ALEXANDRE BARMINE

MEMOIRS OF A SOVIET DIPLOMAT

TWENTY YEARS IN THE SERVICE OF THE U.S.S.R.

By

ALEXANDRE BARMINE

Translated by GERARD HOPKINS

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TO
MARY
WITH DEEP LOVE

LETTER FROM ALEXANDRE BARMINE

Addressed, 1st December 1937, to the Committee of Enquiry into the Moscow Trials, and to the Central Committee of the League of the Rights of Man.

Having just left the service of the Government of the U.S.S.R., I feel it my duty to bring to your knowledge the following facts, and to lodge with you, in the name of Humanity and of the Rights of Man, an indignant protest against crimes the list of which grows daily longer.

In December 1935 I was appointed First Secretary of Legation for the U.S.S.R. in Athens, and since March 1937, I acted as Chargé d'Affaires. For nineteen years I was in Soviet government service; for nineteen years I was a member of the Russian Communist Party. I fought for the Soviet régime, and dedicated all my energies to the cause of the Workers' State.

In 1919 I entered the Red Army as a volunteer, and, six months later was appointed Political Commissar, first of a battalion, then of a regiment, in recognition of distinguished conduct in the field. After passing through the school for Red Officers I held several commands on the western front. After the offensive against Warsaw, the Military Council of the XVIth Army detailed me to attend a course at the Staff College. In 1923 I was retired with the rank of Brigadier-General. I carried out the duties of Consul-General of the U.S.S.R. in Persia during the period 1923–1925; for ten years I was on the roll of the Department of External Commerce; from 1929–1931 I held the post of Director-General of Imports in France and Italy; in 1932 I was official agent for the U.S.S.R. in Belgium and a member of the Government Delegation to Poland in 1935; while, for the whole period from 1934–1935 I was President of the Central Trust controlling the

Exportation of all products of the Automobile and Aviation Industries—the Auto-Moto-Export.

Such, in short, was my record of service before my Greek appointment. Whatever my duties, my one object has ever been to forward sincerely the interests of my country and of Socialism.

The recent trials in Moscow have filled me with a sense of amazement and horror. I find it quite impossible to justify the execution of the old leaders of the Revolution, in spite of the confessions which they have so lavishly supplied. These confessions, indeed, have but had the effect of further troubling my conscience and of giving a further lease of life to my last illusions.

My deep attachment to the working classes and to the Soviet people, and the difficulty I experienced in believing that its leaders could be guilty of such crimes, led me at first to do violence to my own convictions, and to resign myself to the facts. I hoped that if I made this effort, I should still be able to serve the cause of Socialism. But the events of the last few months have stripped me of my last remaining illusions. Trials widely and loudly publicised have been staged with the object of carrying out a mass extermination of the mainstays of the Russian Communist Party, in other words, of the men who, in the old days, carried on agitation at the risk of their liberty, who made the Revolution and the Civil War, and who achieved victory for the first Workers' State. To-day these men have been spattered with mud and handed over to the executioner. It is quite obvious to me that a reactionary dictatorship is now in control of my country.

I have seen my leaders and my friends, all of them old Bolsheviks, vanish behind prison walls where, probably, they have been executed or "suppressed". Among them are: Krestinsky, Ambassador and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs; Arossev, President of the Society for

Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries; Karakhan, former Commissar and Ambassador at Ankara (said to have been shot); Iouréniev, Ambassador, and Commissar-General of the Red Army from 1918–1919; Eliava, People's Vice-Commissar for External Commerce, whose colleague I had the honour to be; many friends and comrades with whom I worked and struggled at different times over a period of twenty years, such, for instance, as Zuckerman and Fechner, both of them Directors of Foreign Affairs in Moscow; several of the U.S.S.R. Ministers abroad, Asmus (Helsingfors), Podolsky (Kaunas), Ostrovsky, the friend and protégé of Voroshilov (Bucarest); three generals, Hekker, Schmidt and Savitsky, all heroes of the Civil War and my companions at the Staff College; and finally, the Ambassadors Davtian, Karsky, Bigomolov, Rosenberg, and Brodovsky. Though I had known the members of this latter group personally for only a short time, I am quite convinced that their honesty and loyalty was beyond all question.

I want to address to the general public an urgent, a desperate appeal on behalf of, at least, those in the above list who may still be living, and against the false and ignoble charges of which they have been made the victims. My thoughts are full of my friends who have remained at their posts in the various countries of Europe, Asia and America, daily threatened by a similar fate, and faced by the tragic dilemma—go back to certain death, or, give up all hope of ever seeing their country again, and run the risk of being shot in a foreign country by one of those agents of the Secret Police who are still dogging my footsteps.

Had I consented to remain in the service of Stalin I should have felt myself morally defiled, and should have had to take a share in the responsibility for crimes committed daily against the people of my country. It would have meant betraying the cause of Socialism to which I have dedicated my life.

In breaking with the Government I obeyed the dictates of my conscience. I fully realise the dangers to which I have exposed myself by so doing. I have signed my own death sentence, and made myself a target for hired assassins. The knowledge that this is so can in no way influence my conduct.

I have sent my resignation to the Foreign Office in Moscow, and have resigned all claims to advantages and immunities due to diplomatic representatives. To-day I am nothing but a political refugee who has placed himself under the protection of the laws and of the public opinion of the country whose hospitality he now enjoys. In obeying my conscience I am convinced that I am more than ever loyal to the ideas which I have served all my life.

May my words contribute a little to the task of enlightening public opinion on a régime which has, in fact, denied the tenets of Socialism and the claims of Humanity.

I am, yours sincerely
ALEXANDRE BARMINE

PARIS, *1st December 1937*

LETTER FROM ALEXANDRE BARMINE

Published in *The Times*, London, 2nd March 1938

DEAR SIR,

In the obituary of M. Sedov Trotsky, which appeared in *The Times* of February 19, there is a reference to myself which has caused a misunderstanding of my position. Although I have the greatest respect for Leo Trotsky, Lenin's brilliant lieutenant, and for his son Sedov, whose political and personal honour cannot be affected by the calumnies of Stalinite forgers, I have never belonged to the opposition movement, which is led by Trotsky. I am not a Trotskyite, and I do not belong to the Fourth International or to any other political organisation. I made this clear in my first statement to the Press. After breaking with a régime which has become a bloody personal dictatorship, I have decided to abstain from any political activity.

I am, sir, yours faithfully

ALEXANDRE BARMINE

PARIS, *25th February 1938*

CONTENTS

Page

Letter from Alexandre Barmine to the Committee of Enquiry into the Moscow Trials and to the League of the Rights of Man, *1st December 1937* . . . vii

Letter to *The Times*, *2nd March 1938* . . . xi

FIRST PART

Chapter

I. I AM AT MY POST IN GREECE 3

II. I AVOID A TRAP AND TAKE TO FLIGHT . 18

SECOND PART

III. CHILDHOOD 39

IV. WAR AND REVOLUTION 50

V. INVASIONS 59

VI. CIVIL WAR 71

VII. STUDENT LIFE, EPIDEMICS, BATTLES . . 81

VIII. WE DID NOT TAKE WARSAW 92

IX. THE WAR COLLEGE OF THE RED STAR . 104

X. MISSION TO BOKHARA 118

XI. THE FEUDAL EAST AND THE SOVIET . . 129

XII. FROM BOKHARA TO THE CAFÉ DE PÉGASE . 137

XIII. THE BEGINNINGS OF SOVIET DIPLOMACY . 151

XIV. FIRST MUTTERINGS OF THE STORM . . 161

XV. MAN IS BORN TO SORROW . . . 172

THIRD PART

Chapter *Page*

XVI. PERSIA WILL NEVER BE A REPUBLIC 185

XVII. TEHERAN, STAMBUL, ATHENS, ROME, BERLIN, MOSCOW 200

XVIII. THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TROTSKYISM . . 212

XIX. THE BITTERNESS OF PARTY STRIFE . . 223

XX. PARIS, THE GREAT PLAN, THE BATTLE FOR GOLD 231

XXI. MOSCOW, PARIS, ITALY, AND BELGIUM—1930–1932 245

XXII. THE U.S.S.R. AFTER FIVE YEARS OF INDUSTRIALISATION 264

XXIII. A JOURNEY IN POLAND 272

XXIV. THE DIFFICULTY OF EXPORTING LORRIES TO PERSIA 294

XXV. THE FIRING-SQUADS OF MOSCOW ARE HEARD IN ATHENS 310

XXVI. MY LAST VISIT TO RUSSIA. . . . 320

XXVII. "THEY HAVE BUILT THE SOCIALIST STATE FOR THEIR OWN ENDS . . ." . . . 337

INDEX 349

ILLUSTRATIONS

ALEXANDRE BARMINE . . . . *Frontispiece*
MY COTTAGE AT KALAMAKI, ATHENS . *facing page* 4
AT THE ACROPOLIS, ATHENS, WITH M. AND MME KOBETSKY . . . ,, 13
LENIN . . . . . . ,, 52
GENERAL SCHMIDT . . . . ,, 80
RAKOVSKY . . . . . . ,, 80
TROTSKY . . . . . . ,, 97
CHICHERIN . . . . . . ,, 154
M. LITVINOV WITH SOKOLNIKOV AND KRESTINSKY . . . . . ,, 160
ZINOVIEV . . . . . . ,, 192
THE BAY OF VOULAGMENI, NEAR ATHENS, 1937 . . . . . . ,, 209
L. KAMÉNEV . . . . . ,, 224
A. ROSENGOLTZ . . . . . ,, 240
TOMSKY . . . . . . ,, 240
STALIN AND MOLOTOV . . . . ,, 257
ATHENS TO MOSCOW, DECEMBER 1936 . ,, 266
THE WHITE SEA–BALTIC CANAL . . ,, 273
VOROSHILOV . . . . . ,, 288
MARSHAL TOUKHATCHEVSKY . . ,, 300
FLIGHT-COMMANDER ALKSNIS . . ,, 305
ADMIRAL ORLOV . . . . . ,, 305

GREECE: THE TURKISH MINISTER, HIS WIFE, M. KOBETSKY AND MYSELF . . *facing page* 320
A WAYSIDE CHURCH . . . . „ 320
AN IDLE INTERLUDE IN GREECE . . „ 337
REFUGEE IN FRANCE, AT CÔTE D'ARGENT, AUGUST 1937 . . . . „ 337

FIRST PART

"There is a charm in the name of Ancient Greece. There is glory in every page of her history. There is a fascination in the remains of her literature, and a sense of unapproachable beauty in her works of art. There is a spell in her climate still, and a strange attraction in her ruins. . . ."

ALEXANDER S. MURRAY
Manual of Mythology (Introduction)

CHAPTER I

I AM AT MY POST IN GREECE . . .

I SHOULD like, indeed I ought, to begin this book, in which I tell the story of my destiny and of its last tragic chapter after twenty years of revolutionary activity, by inditing an ode to Hellas. My own personal drama, which, when all is said, bulks very small in comparison with that of a whole vast country and of an era irradiated by such dazzling hopes, has come to its final point, its ultimate unravelling, beneath the incomparable skies of the Aegean Sea, among scenes which no traveller, having once viewed ever forgets. . . .

I lived in a modest cottage at Kalamaki, quite close to Athens. Each morning I was awakened by the sound of horses' hoofs on a road already bathed in sunshine. A giant mulberry tree cast its shadow over the tiny white house which it almost enveloped in its leafy boughs. A small Ford, covered with dust, and drenched, during the night hours, with dew, dozed beneath the wall. All around stood the scattered pink and white houses of the peasants; the hillside was covered with terraced vines. The main road, skirting the sea, divided our little settlement from the rich villas. It was a corner of the world that unhappiness, misery, crime and sadness had left, it seemed, untouched. Could such things exist anywhere in the world? Looking at the Bay of Phalerum, its limpid blue bordered afar off by the mountains, and at the white smudge of Athens among its rocks and trees, one doubted it. The water-carrier passed down the road, uttering his cry "*Ne—rou—l-a-a-s!*" The daughter of my neighbour's gardener brought me my breakfast—a cup of aromatic coffee, some bread and some goat's-milk cheese . . . I ran down to the sea for a bathe. I was alone, with nothing but endless peace for company. In the distance a few white yachts rocked gently to and fro. A little later, the Ford took me into Athens, twisting and turning giddily up by the airport, gathering speed to breast the hill. The Acropolis stood out rose-red against the sky between its twin rocky sentinels, Likavitos, crowned by a white church, and Philopapos. The city lay spread out round its three hills, the mountains of Parnassus and Pentelicon giving to the scene a quality bred of classic memories. Hadrian's Gate and the Byron Monument were left behind; the huge marble oval of the Stadium vanished. I drew up at the gates of the Legation.

The house stood quite close to the Royal Palace. The comfortable building, with its big, shady rooms, had once been the Imperial Russian Legation, and we had taken it over. There was very little work to be done. The days passed drowsily there: they should have been peaceful. Athens was not a fighting post. My duty consisted in glancing through the Greek, foreign, and Soviet newspapers, in writing a few letters, in replying to the memoranda of the Foreign Minister, and in seeing my colleagues. . . . Everything was going well. There was no reason for the U.S.S.R. and Greece to fear one another. No tiresome incident could possibly arise. Acting, as I was, as Chargé d'Affaires in the minister's absence, I could not have wished for a better situation. The diplomat who serves his country in such conditions, free from dangers and complications, should be the happiest of men. . . . I had a feeling, however, that my personal tragedy was working up inexorably to a climax, and that it formed part of an infinitely greater catastrophe to the tracing of which historians of the future would owe many a headache.

The dictatorship of General Metaxas had been

MY COTTAGE AT KALAMAKI, ATHENS, 1937

established in Greece with the consent of the King, George II, lately returned from exile. We had very little to do with the new régime. We ignored it, and it ignored us, though the rules of courtesy were observed by both sides. Matters of importance were provisionally shelved. They could wait. Greek society tended to avoid us. The tone of the newspapers was officially optimistic. The General had given them the lead when he had summed up the situation in a concise statement which, though the first of its kind, was later to be followed by many similar proclamations:

> On the 4th of August our fortunate country entered on the third period of Hellenic culture.
>
> IAN METAXAS

Pericles made famous the first; Metaxas initiated the third. Thrice happy Greeks!

Moscow took little interest in these events fraught with such intense significance for Hellas. It might have taken rather more in the influence of Germany which was becoming daily more apparent in the affairs of the Third Culture—not wholly unrelated, perhaps, to the Third Reich. But the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs seemed to be suffering from a strange torpor. For some months I had been acting as substitute for Kobetsky, who was away sick, and who died, later, in the Kremlin clinic. I was left without instructions or information. Krestinsky, former ambassador in Berlin, our Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, had just been relieved of his post and appointed instead to the Commissariat of Justice. I was soon to hear that he had been arrested. The signature of Stern, Director of the Balkan Department, had ceased to appear on official documents. I was soon to hear that he had been arrested. Something was going on at home. My dispatches remained for months unanswered.

One morning, early in June 1937, I opened the papers as usual. The Greek sheets were devoid of interest. Tranquillity was the watchword of the day. The very envelopes of the letters I received were stamped with the slogan:

> Hellenes, sleep in peace: Hellas is strong.
> IAN METAXAS

I knew it. I could not be so impolite as to doubt it. The telephone bell rang; my secretary came in to say that the director of a Press Agency was insisting that he must have a few words with me. I took up the receiver.

"We have just heard, sir, by radio from Moscow, that the Vice-Commissar for Defence has committed suicide. Can you confirm the news and give us any idea of what lies behind it?"

"I have received no such information from Moscow. Marshal Voroshilov, the People's Commissar for Defence, has four Vice-Commissars—Gamarnik, Toukhatchevsky, Alksnis and Orlov. I trust that all are well. . . ."[1]

I had a brief moment of anxiety. Suicide? Whose? Then I shrugged my shoulders. Just another false rumour. One had one's work cut out to keep track of them all. For months now the Press of Germany and Italy had been sowing a thick crop of them in connexion with everything to do with U.S.S.R. For all that, however, since the Piatakov trial and the execution of the thirteen leaders found guilty in that affair, nearly five months had passed without any serious incident to mark them. Arrests and disappearances were still, to be sure, going on, but, so far from weakening, my hope that things would soon return to normal was growing stronger. Bloodshed and the destruction of what cannot be mended kill hope in the minds of only those who have nothing but hope to live on. One just forced oneself to forget the nightmare of the two Moscow trials, comforting oneself with the thought that the leaders of the opposition had, perhaps, at the price of lies, grovelling humility, and death, made it possible for Stalin to govern the country in future with a greater sense of security, and to pave the way to peace. I returned to my reading.

---

[1] The three other Vice-Commissars were shot less than a year after Gamarnik's suicide.

Two hours later, one of the Legation staff, a young Communist sent recently from Moscow, a fellow of intelligence and application, came into my room with a white face, holding an evening paper in his hand.

"Gamarnik has committed suicide."

Both of us could see in imagination the face of the old officer; could remember, without prompting, the record of his political services in the Red Army. His long, fan-shaped beard—rather like that of the explorer Otto Schmidt—was a familiar object throughout the length and breadth of the Union. I forced myself to keep calm, and replied with as much detachment as I could muster:

"We must wait for the Moscow papers. The devil knows what may happen to anyone."

For about two years no Communist had been able to put his thoughts into words or to express what he felt except to his most intimate friends. We had grown accustomed never to drop the mask in any circumstances whatever. One could be sure of nobody. But even this degree of caution could not always save a man from being denounced. I had had experience, and I knew.

That evening the members of the Legation staff gathered to hear the radio bulletin from Moscow. Everyone knew what had happened, but nobody alluded to what was in the thoughts of all. We even tried to joke as usual. The wireless spokesman reported progress on the Moscow metro, mentioned the Party Conference, gave figures relative to the housing campaign and the latest total of metallurgical output. Without the slightest sign of emotion, the voice continued:

> "Gamarnik, ex-member of the Central Committee of the Party, fearing that his anti-Soviet machinations would be unmasked, has just killed himself. . . . Weather Report—forecast for to-morrow. . . ."

Gamarnik had filled the position of Commissar-General to the Political Department of the Army. An "Old Bolshevik", that is to say a veteran of the Party, and one of those who had participated in the original Revolution, he had belonged to the Central Committee of the Organising Bureau of the Party, the supreme administrative and executive body which appointed to every important post in the Government service. Not an official but was nominated by this bureau, which acted in the closest collaboration with the Political Bureau. Twice every week Gamarnik had sat in intimate consultation with Stalin and Ejov—the new head of the police—with, that is, the two "comrades" who now sent him to his death. For I had not the slightest doubt that he had resorted to suicide at the very last moment, taking that final, desperate way of escaping arrest, the inevitable torture—psychological at least—which would have followed it, and the closing scene before the firing-squad. Two days previously, the Party Conference in Moscow, every detail of which was prepared beforehand by the Political Bureau, had appointed Gamarnik to the Moscow Committee. Every effort had been made to lull his suspicions on the very eve of proclaiming him an outlaw. What was happening at the Kremlin?

Still worse news came in the course of the next few days. . . . A *communiqué* was issued, announcing the arrest of Marshal Toukhatchevsky, together with seven of the most famous generals of the Red Army, their trial in camera, the sentence of high treason passed on them, and their execution. This was followed by a second *communiqué* specifically accusing the dead men of conspiracy. There came to us over the radio the raucous tones of the speaker reading out the resolutions passed by various meetings of intellectuals, workmen, artists, scientists and students, demanding the death penalty or applauding the fact that it had been carried out on these "Fascist traitors", "mad dogs", "criminal off-scourings of humanity", and "stinking vermin".

At the Legation nobody breathed a word about what had happened. Our daily routine continued with apparent smoothness. My colleagues were careful to let it be generally understood that they believed the Moscow version of what had occurred—as, indeed, did I. But I could not sleep. Never yet had I lived beneath a more lowering sky than here amidst the blue and gold of the Athenian summer.

Most of the men who had been shot were known to me, and with some I had been on friendly terms, notably with Toukhatchevsky. He would live in my memory as the first commander of the First Iron Division, as the conqueror of Admiral Koltchak, as the great leader of the advance on Warsaw. Of his companions in misfortune perhaps the most gifted, in a constellation of soldiers comparable only to the brilliant young generals produced by the French Revolution, had been Ouborévitch, to whom we in great part owed the restoration of efficiency in the Red Army after the Civil War. A member of the Bolshevik party before the Revolution, he, in conjunction with Marshal Egorov and several of the men just executed, had done much to establish it in power by defeating General Denikin and the last remaining White forces of the Far East, in 1922. His last military command had been that of White Russia, a post of the highest importance since that district is the key to all the western parts of the U.S.S.R. He was a far abler man than Voroshilov, who, however, had forced him out of the military administration. To him had been due the earliest attempts at mechanisation, carried on, after his removal from the Commissariat of Defence, by Toukhatchevsky whose more conciliatory temperament had made it possible for him to work with Voroshilov.

Iakir also had belonged to the Party in the days before the Revolution. While still a young man he had won distinction by breaking through the iron ring which the enemy had drawn round his troops in the Odessa neighbourhood in 1919. His famous 44th Division had, on that occasion, fought a way through to safety. Later, he had become one of the best informed of all our generals, a member of the Central Committee of the Party, and of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Ukraine. . . . Primakov! Eydeman! Kork!—why, these men had been for us, in the war years, the very incarnation of confidence! One and all, they had won their spurs. Ever since the dismissal of Trotsky, its inspired founder, the Red Army had always stood outside controversial politics. Naturally, having won their victories under Trotsky's aegis and as his collaborators, these officers could not but feel for him a sympathy born of shared memories. But I knew too well their professional honesty and their undoubted patriotism to admit for a moment any hint of opposition on their part. It was sheer madness to accuse them of treachery in the interests of Germany, even if the charges brought against them by an alleged court of their peers had been less vague than in fact they were.

I knew that no contact with foreign Powers was ever made, or ever could be made, except under the severe control of the Political Bureau. It was possible, of course, that the men who had been in charge of our former military policy were being sacrificed in order to save the faces of those actually responsible, to hide the fact that concessions were being made or guarantees for the future being given. . . . Guarantees? To whom? Most probably to Germany, for what other country would stand to gain so much by the weakening of our army as a result of the destruction of its leaders? The most likely explanation was that the murdered generals had objected to the elimination of the Party, with all the fatal consequences which such elimination would have so far as the military situation was concerned. Poutna and Primakov had joined the Opposition in 1927, and for that reason and that alone, had been arrested in 1936, together with certain other individuals. Their companions in arms had doubtless tried to defend them. A few imprudent words, the mere fact of signing a protest to the Central Committee, would have been enough to ensure the issue of their death-warrants. In Stalin's eyes they had been dangerous, "disaffected" elements, and therefore he had shot them. . . . Outside Russia they were now the sole topics of discussion. But still further information had come into my hands. I knew that my former chief, the Corps Commander Hekker, once in charge of the Foreign Department of the Commissariat of Defence, had recently vanished; that some twenty of the younger generals, recently in charge of various departments of the Headquarters Staff, and former colleagues of mine at the Military College, had suffered the same fate; that hundreds of senior officers, bound by long years of collaboration to the murdered men, had been arrested. The only military leaders of real distinction who now remained alive were Marshals Egorov and Blücher, Admiral Orlov, Alksnis, who commanded the Flying Corps, and the former Admiral of the Fleet Mouklévitch. How long would they be left at liberty? (As I write these memoirs, with the exception of Voroshilov, Blücher is the sole survivor. . . .)

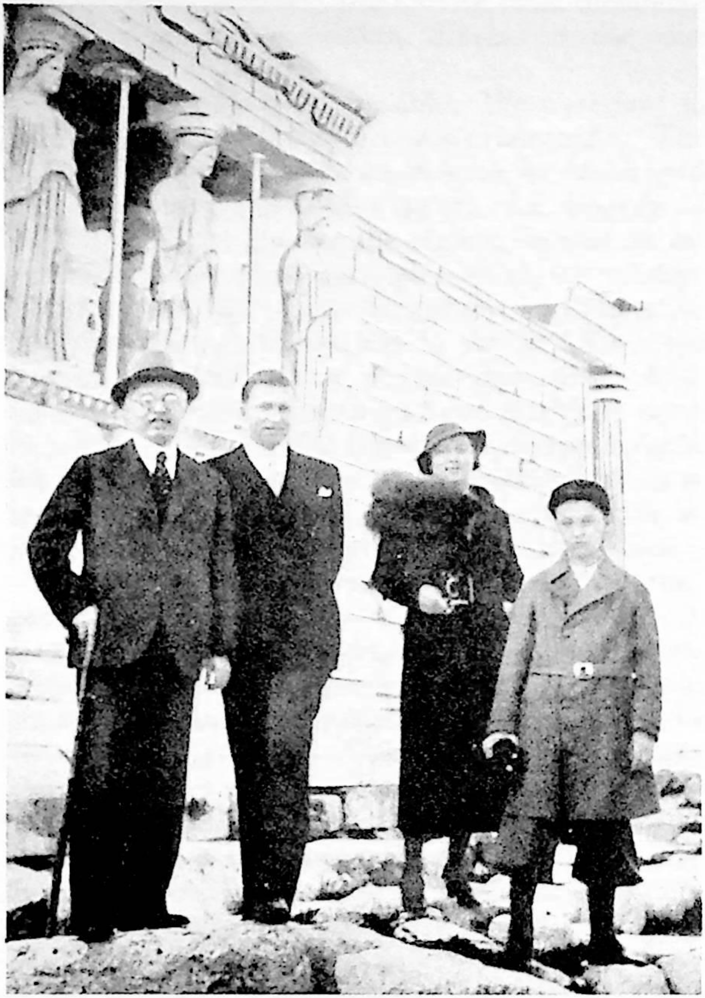
No further doubt was possible. We were face to face with something in the nature of a catastrophe. The trial of Zinoviev and Piatakov was not, as we had hoped, the end, but only the beginning of the tragedy. Some terrible evil was sapping the régime, leaving no trace of the belief in men and principles which for twenty years had kept us going. A few days earlier I had been discussing plans for our future life in the U.S.S.R. with the woman who was dearer to me than ever. And now she saw me prostrated with grief and unable to say a word to her. . . . How could I make her understand that our whole life had fallen in ruins—everything which we had spent our days in serving, everything for which we had lived, for which, if need be, we would have died?

The days that followed the execution of the eight generals were filled with a sense of disaster. At the Legation no one said a word. We suspected everyone; each of us felt stifled under the weight of private thoughts. An evening came when one of my assistants hung about my room, loath to leave. We exchanged silent looks, and then, suddenly, I committed the imprudence, perhaps the fatal imprudence, of saying:

"What on earth's happening there? This is too frightful. The flower and pride of the army—snuffed out!" I made an effort to control myself. . . . "Let's get out of this. Would you like a walk?"

We wandered silently through the streets of Athens. My companion said nothing.

An official of the Foreign Office, who had just arrived from Moscow, described to me the occasion of Toukhatchevsky's last appearance in public, six weeks before his death. . . . It was at the May Day review on the Red



AT THE ACROPOLIS, ATHENS

M. KOBETSKY SOVIET MINISTER   MYSELF   MME KOBETSKY AND NEPHEW

Square. The news had just been made public that he was not, after all, to go to London for the Coronation of the King of England, but that Admiral Orlov was to take his place. As a result, he seemed to stand there isolated in a zone of icy coldness. He took his place on the tribune reserved for the marshals, to the right of Lenin's tomb, where he was left severely alone. None of the generals and marshals present wished to be seen speaking to the head of the army who had fallen so strangely out of favour. Toukhatchevsky remained where he was like a man smitten with the plague. He seemed tired; his lustreless complexion looked greyer than usual, but his expression betrayed nothing of his thoughts. He watched the troops whom he was seeing for the last time. It may be that he had a clear presentment of what was in store for him, for when an official in the U.S.S.R. falls from power, there is no return: disgrace is the prelude to execution—a marshal of the Revolution, once he has become suspect to the Tyrant, can look for nothing but death.

Eleven days later, the papers announced that Toukhatchevsky, relieved of his functions as deputy to Voroshilov, had been appointed military commander of the Volga district. He was arrested as soon as he reached Saratov, and was brought back to Moscow—in a prison van, so my informant told me. Iakir, removed from his post as commander of the Ukraine, and nominated military governor of Leningrad, was arrested without warning, together with his wife, as they passed through Moscow. These changes of appointment were nothing but a trap, since the authorities dared not arrest a senior officer among his own men. A similar state of panic preceded the actual executions. According to the papers the eight men were shot during the night following their trial.

Certain English papers printed a story to the effect that Marshal Toukhatchevsky had been carried wounded, on a stretcher, into the court-room. This was probably a journalistic invention. It is more than likely that no actual trial ever took place at all. Stalin would scarcely have dared to parade his victims before the eyes of their companions in arms charged, for publicity purposes, with the duty of sitting in judgment on them. Verbal exchanges between them would have been fraught with too much danger to himself. Marshals Boudienny and Blücher, generals like Alksnis and Kachirin, Admiral Orlov, were called upon to sign a *communiqué* relating to a trial which had never been held. Voroshilov did not figure among the judges. This legal murder of his principal colleagues would have discredited him too greatly, and would have made his position an impossible one. "Either he must have been guilty too, or he was incompetent", is what people would have said. . . . For a whole day it was rumoured in the capital that he too had been arrested. . . . Whatever the explanation, it was only some considerable time later that Voroshilov's signature was appended to the report of the trial. What convinces me that there never was any actual trial is that several of Toukhatchevsky's "judges" have already suffered a similar fate (Alksnis, Orlov, and three others), while the name of Marshal Egorov, who was linked for twenty years by close personal ties to both Stalin and Voroshilov, though appearing in the original list of judges, vanished from it as soon as the verdict was made public, and the man himself seems now to have fallen into disgrace.

I was told that Toukhatchevsky's daughter, a child of 12 years of age, had at first been kept in ignorance of her father's fate. The day, however, on which the official *communiqué* was issued, she was greeted by her school-fellows with booing. They shouted that they would not sit on the same bench as the daughter of a Fascist traitor. . . . The girl went home, shut herself into her room, and hanged herself. Her mother, arrested the following day, went suddenly mad, and was sent away to the district of the Urals in a strait-jacket. Other particulars given to me included this—that in the single military area of Kiev, six to seven hundred senior officers who had been associated with Iakir, either because of a common revolutionary past, or as a natural consequence of the chances of military service, had been arrested.

Odds and ends of news published by the Soviet Press served to confirm these various stories. The director of one of the Kiev cinemas was arrested because he had allowed a film to be shown in which Toukhatchevsky appeared. The directors of a wireless station were arrested for having broadcast a funeral march on the same day that the generals were executed—obviously a pure coincidence, since nobody would have been guilty of the suicidal folly of deliberately staging such a manifestation.

I knew Iakir's wife. She had been his constant companion for twenty years, sharing his early battles, and later his studies and his periods of high office. As a courageous and well-educated Communist, she had more than once been able to give him advice. The papers published a letter in which she blackguarded this man with whom she had lived for so long, calling him an "infamous traitor". It was quite clear to me that she had been made to sign this monstrous document, either under threat, or persuaded that by doing so she was serving higher interests. But what could such interests be? What remained that was worth saving?

The *Izvestia* announced that Marie Nicolaevna Toukhatchevsky, the marshal's sister, was seeking permission to change her name.

I was informed of what had been happening in the

Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. Krestinsky, one of our oldest diplomatists and a deputy of Litvinov's, had been transferred to the Department of Justice, and, later, had disappeared. That such a man should be arrested was inconceivable—but he was. The director of the department of the Foreign Office dealing with Germany and the Balkans, David Stern, a German Communist writer living as a refugee in the U.S.S.R., had been arrested one night and, like Krestinsky, had disappeared. His wife and child had followed him in tears, out of the flat on to the landing, only to be pushed back with blows by the police. Next day they were thrown into the street by the manager of the Foreign Office building in which their quarters were situated. I had known Stern. He was a young man (35 years old), a writer of talent and an extremely hard worker, though his health kept him most of the time in a sanatorium. Under the name of Georg Born he wrote a number of documented and rather highly coloured volumes on the Nazi movement: *Note-Book of an S.S. Man*, and *In the Service of the Gestapo*. The *Pravda* used to praise his books, which were published by the Central Committee of Communist Youth in very large editions. But now the *Pravda* contained an article by Zaslavsky on the German spy, Georg Born, "this degenerate product of the Gestapo, who, after long last, has been unmasked and duly punished". (Just before the opening of the Bukharin–Krestinsky trial, the English papers announced that Stern had hanged himself in prison. If this is true, the poor wretch probably put an end to his life as the only alternative to being forced into playing the miserable role which subsequently fell to the lot of Bessonov. As a matter of fact, when Krestinsky was at the Berlin Embassy, Stern had served for many years as his Press Attaché.) His arrest was the signal for a wide-spread purge of the whole Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. It was directed by Ejov, who appointed a creature of his own, a certain Korjenko, an official of the O.G.P.U., as Litvinov's Superintendent of Personnel. A clean sweep was made of the various heads of departments and directors of services, all of whom were arrested. There were even rumours that Iouréniev, my former chief and intimate friend, ambassador in Tokyo and recently appointed to Berlin, was looked upon in Moscow with no very friendly eye; that Rosenberg, once Chargé d'Affaires in Paris, then delegate to the League of Nations, and subsequently our ambassador to Madrid, had disappeared, and that many lesser-known men were now in prison. The same drama was played out at the Commissariat of Foreign Trade, the chief of which, Rosengoltz, together with his assistants, Eliava and Loganovsky, in collaboration with whom I had worked for years, disappeared, dragging down into the darkness all who had been connected with them either by ties of business or friendship. . . . The nightmare ceased to have any sense, but it involved more and more individuals as the days passed.

CHAPTER II

I AVOID A TRAP AND TAKE TO FLIGHT

I HAD spoken very little on these matters to my colleagues at the Legation—very little, but already too much. One of them was summoned to Moscow, and did not come back. My friends in the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs gave up writing to me. My minister had died in Moscow, and Litvinov made no reply to my requests for instructions. On learning of Kobetsky's death I had sealed his desk and written to headquarters asking what was to be done with his papers. One day, Loukianov, the Head of the Chancery came into my room holding a telegram, and looking embarrassed.

"I have just had orders from Potemkin personally to supervise the sealing of Kobetsky's papers and to see that they are sent to Moscow. . . . What am I to do?"

"This order should have been addressed to me as Chief of the Diplomatic Mission," I replied. "You must obey your orders."

It was clear to me from this that I had lost the confidence of the authorities at home, who preferred, apparently, to deal with Loukianov, who had four brothers in the U.S.S.R., one of whom held an important position in the Secretariat of the Central Committee of Young Communists, and owed to this fact his Athens appointment and his confidential relations with the Foreign Office. Naturally, Potemkin could have had no idea that within a fortnight Loukianov's highly placed brother was to be thrown into prison as an "enemy of the people". . . . It occurred to me that my former connexion with some of the influential Communists who had recently fallen from power might explain the suspicion which now seemed to attach to me; either that, or the statement of some lying informer. I wrote to Moscow asking to be recalled. I had lost all keenness for my diplomatic job, and found any contact with my colleagues and with Athenian society extremely painful. I kept away from receptions and refused all invitations. If I had been able to bury myself in some deserted spot I should most certainly have done so. What could I possibly say to foreign diplomats who asked me politely what was happening at home and what was likely to be the upshot of the Toukhatchevsky affair? I might, of course, have given the conventional answer—"The Red Army is stronger than ever, now that the traitors have been weeded out. With a man of genius like Stalin, my dear sir, we need fear nothing!"—but my lips refused to form the words. Such a statement would have seemed to me nothing short of a bad joke. As it was, I replied evasively that I knew no more than what the papers said, trying, meanwhile, to keep myself from blushing. I remembered something that my friend Dovgalevsky, our ambassador in Paris, had once said: "The diplomat differs in one way and one way only from the witness in a court of law: he must tell the truth, but he must never tell the whole truth." . . . The point had been reached at which I could no longer tell the truth at all. It was no longer possible for me to serve Stalin's government abroad. I must get out.

Moscow delayed replying to my request for recall. I prepared to meet my fate. A wave of hatred and suspicion of all foreigners had already begun its destructive work in Moscow. The extermination of the whole foreign colony, of enthusiastic and loyal citizens who had come to Russia to put their knowledge at the service of the Socialist government, was proceeding with deliberate thoroughness. Hundreds were condemned and imprisoned. Had I any right to sacrifice a human being who was dear to me—

to take her with me along a road that was bound to end in repression and suffering, simply because she believed in me and loved me? No, my duty was to refuse such a sacrifice. With a full heart I announced to the woman who was to be my wife, and who had left for Paris two weeks earlier, my impending departure for the U.S.S.R., begging her to give up, for the time being, any idea of going to Russia, and not to be surprised if I could not write to her. However long my silence, even should it be for years, she must never lose her faith in me. I wrote to my sons that I should shortly be returning to Moscow, that my stay abroad was ended. They would once more see their father. I was bringing them, I said, bicycles, satchels, and some stamp albums—unbelievable treasure-trove! What perils should I find awaiting me? Even in these difficult times there was no conceivable evidence of a criminal nature against me. But surely something of an unpleasant kind was bound to happen? I might be imprisoned, but the most likely eventuality was that I should be deported to some distant corner of Russia. . . .

I began to grow nervous at Litvinov's continued silence. One morning in July, arriving rather earlier than usual at the Legation, I caught a clerk going through my drawers. His embarrassment was no less obvious than my own. Clearly he was acting on instructions. The O.G.P.U. had its agents among us as I very well knew.

"I was looking for that telegram that came in yesterday on the subject of visas," he stammered. "I had an idea that I'd brought it to you, by mistake, along with the visas themselves."

"Well, it certainly isn't there. I should be obliged if you would conduct your search elsewhere."

A few days later, as I was on my way downstairs to get into the car and go home, I saw, through a glass door, Loukianov, the Head of the Chancery, rummaging in my document case. I entered the room sharply. Loukianov made an awkward movement, and we stood there looking at one another. Each of us knew that the other knew. . . .

The same day I received a letter from my son Boris, whom I always called the elder of the twins, because he was the bigger. He said that he was going with his brother and his grandmother to the south, far, far, away "to bathe in the sea". A little farther on there was this passage: "Dear Papa, They read out to us the sentence passed on the Trotskyist spies, Toukhatchevsky, Iakir, Kork, Ouborévitch and Feldman . . ." (The child had got all the names right; obviously he had been made to learn them.) "Wasn't it Feldman who used to live in the courtyard of our house?" I remembered a poem written by a schoolboy of twelve which was published during the Zinoviev trial. Each verse had ended with the refrain:

> Like mad dogs will we shoot them all.

What would my boys think if I should be imprisoned as the result of some vile, lying charge of which I should never be able to clear myself? I felt that very soon I should lose them.

A few days later the situation became suddenly clarified. I had arranged to go out in a boat fishing with a Greek friend of mine, at Voulagméni. It was Friday, the 16th of July. My friend, who was an Athenian student, was to call for me at the villa about 6 p.m. The Commercial Attaché rang me up on the telephone, ending his conversation with the following words: ". . . Well, I shall see you soon, as we arranged, on board. . . . Will it do if I come round about seven?"

In this extraordinary way I learned, from a third party, that, unknown to myself, I had accepted an invitation to dine with the captain of a Soviet vessel which had just dropped anchor at the Piraeus, the *Roudzoutak.* (Ian

Roudzoutak, a member of the Political Bureau, had not, at this date, been declared an enemy of the people; that was to come later. . . .) Nobody had breathed a word to me about the ship's arrival, though I should have been informed officially of the fact. Diplomatic usage ordained that the captain should make it his first duty to call on me.

"I'm afraid I shan't be available. I'm booked this evening."

"But you're expected . . . everything's arranged . . . I gather you promised. . . ."

"I did nothing of the sort."

Half an hour later the captain himself telephoned me from the Piraeus. He apologised for having been kept on board by some urgent repairs. He wanted, he said, to introduce me to his new first officer and to the political representative. There were several important matters he must discuss with me, and he was anxious to show me what a good cook he had. . . . The whole affair was getting odder and odder.

"I'm going fishing at Voulagméni," I answered curtly. "If you really want to see me you can come here. We'll go and have a cup of excellent coffee in the Restaurant du Lac. . . ."

My friend and I started off, rowing briskly. The bay was ideally calm, the scene unforgettable. . . . I was oppressed by my thoughts. On board the *Roudzoutak* I should have been at the mercy of the men who seemed so anxious to get me there. Why? My mind was perfectly clear, but I hesitated; I did not dare to draw the obvious conclusion, so unworthy was the whole business of everybody concerned, of my country, my Party, myself. Besides, what did it all mean?

In the half-light we could see a motor-car draw up on the deserted quay. A group of men got out of it and stood scanning the bay.

"They're looking for us," I said; "let's go back." As I thought, it was the ship's captain, accompanied by two of his new junior officers, the Commercial Attaché, and a couple of men from the Legation. I took them all to a restaurant. The captain wanted the whole party to go back with him on board. . . . "Are they all in the plot?" I wondered . . . and refused.

One of my guests remained behind with me after the others had gone. I knew perfectly well the nature of his secret functions. We sat facing one another across the table, on which stood two minute cups of coffee. The atmosphere had, all evening, been rather tense, and a little incident had occurred which had had the effect of rasping our nerves. The waiter who had brought the bill had taken the money with a trembling hand, and we could hear him later, beating his head against the floor of a neighbouring room in an epileptic fit.

My interlocutor started to tell me a number of rather fantastic stories, keeping his eyes fixed on my face, though he tried to make his voice sound unconcerned.

"When I was in China information came into our hands that one of the secretaries of the Embassy was making plans to run away to Japan. At that time I was acting as Consul. I instructed him to take charge of the diplomatic bag as far as the frontier. To avoid rousing his suspicions, I warned him not to cross into Soviet territory. The bag would be fetched, I said, from the Chinese side of the line. There would be no need for him to carry any papers with him. . . . The chauffeur drove all out and never stopped until he reached the O.G.P.U. car which was waiting for him. . . . The young fellow in question had tried to jump out when he realised that he had been tricked, but of course he wasn't alone. . . . The result was that he was put away for a number of years. . . .

"The story of the dragoman at the Pekin Legation is rather different, and a good deal more complicated. He ran away and succeeded in reaching Hankow. Our people got on his tracks, and two reliable Chinese were entrusted with the job of liquidating him. They succeeded in getting into touch with him and even induced him to accept an invitation to dine at some restaurant or other. But he began to suspect that something was wrong, smelled trouble, and never came to the rendezvous. Next day they shot him in the street. By a sheer miracle he escaped death, a French car having picked him up and carried him off before they could finish the job. . . . He had had his lesson, though. I don't think we shall have much more trouble with him. . . ."

I looked my guest straight in the eyes, and put as much mockery into my glance as I could. His next words left even less doubt of his meaning:

"It wouldn't be difficult to get rid of a man in a country like this. There's always somebody to undertake a little job of that kind for five or ten thousand drachmas, and you can be sure the police'll know nothing about anything. An ideal place for that kind of operation. Which reminds me, there's another story you might be interested to hear. . . ."

"No, thank you; I find these gangster yarns a good deal less interesting than fishing. Good night."

The handshake which I exchanged with my interlocutor when we parted is among the nastiest memories of my life. He, the potential murderer, I the victim enjoying a short reprieve, we none the less kept up the appearances of polite society, and it is to this fact, probably, that I owe my escape. I no longer had the slightest doubt of what was intended. Had I accepted the invitation to go on board the ship, I should never again have landed on Greek soil. If I had resisted I should have provoked a scandal, the repercussions of which would have fallen on the Legation. Not to resist, however, was tantamount to letting myself be spirited away, bound, perhaps, like a criminal, and confined on board. Who, knowing what had happened, would ever believe me in the future when I said that I had been waiting merely for a reply to my letters in order to return to Russia of my own free will? My sense of personal dignity was revolted by the alternatives seemingly open to me. But after the stories I had just heard, after my vision of the captain of the *Roudzoutak*, with his little party of two civilians so obviously sent for the purpose of preventing my escape, I knew that there was no time to lose.

What about my sons? Well, if I went back only to be condemned—however unjustly—as so many others had been, would they suffer any less acutely than if I took refuge abroad? Where could I be most useful to my country—pining in one of Stalin's prisons, or living, a free man, somewhere in the world, knowing the truth and still loyal to the cause I had always served?

Whatever the answers to these questions, I must be sure of avoiding any scandal that might react disastrously on the U.S.S.R.

The next day I noticed that one of my clerks showed an unusual interest in my plans for that night. During the evening, Loukianov, who had just been chatting with me in a friendly fashion, suggested a walk together. I declined.

"Shall you sleep at the Legation or at Kalamaki?"

"At Kalamaki."

But I was not comfortable in my mind. I went into town and spent the night at Kefissia in an hotel. When I returned home next morning I found visible marks of a number of nocturnal visitors on the sanded paths of my garden, wet from the recent rain, and the traces of motor tyres in the private entry that led to the house. "Well," said I to myself, "if you came to look for me round about midnight or two a.m., that means you're in a hurry."

There was no time to be lost. I begged my friend G. to go with me to the Legation. We were neither of us armed, but the presence of a witness might be useful to me. Arrived at my office, I drafted a telegram to Potemkin, who was acting as Litvinov's deputy, in which I announced my intention of taking my annual leave immediately, and asked for arrangements to be made for the temporary handing over of my duties by our attaché, as a preliminary to my permanent supersession. I summoned Loukianov and instructed him to code and dispatch this message without delay. Then I took my companion up to the second floor where I had a convenient suite of rooms.

A few minutes later there was a knock on the door. It was the attaché, who, it seemed, already knew what was in the wind. Seeing that there were two of us, he visibly recoiled. . . . He was frightened. . . . Our interview was conducted according to the rules of normal social intercourse. He had heard, he said, that I was going off at once on a holiday, and had come to inquire after my health. . . . We were not, however, deceived by the apparent ordinariness of his words. . . . He withdrew. I took from a drawer my passport, some photographs and a few letters. Then I glanced for the last time round the familiar room. My friend was rather nervously following my movements. . . .

The Legation porter opened the big double doors of the courtyard. . . .

My diplomatic career was at an end. Nineteen years spent in the service of the Soviets were dead and done with. . . . Seated in my car, I was filled with a sense of bitterness and disgust as I saw the frightened faces of the Legation staff watching our departure from behind half-opened doors. Obviously they imagined that we were armed to the teeth and ready, if need be, to fight our way out.

The city lay under a dead-weight of heat. We drove down the Kefissia road towards the mountains.

I was terribly depressed. To this day I don't know how I managed to get a wink of sleep that night, conscious as I was that my whole life lay in ruins about me.

From the next day onwards we noticed that an undisguised watch was being kept on all our movements. A number of Greek political idealists had volunteered their services as O.G.P.U. spies, and never let us out of their sight. I sent my resignation to Moscow and booked a seat on the Simplon Express. On the day of my departure for Paris I was standing in the hall of the Grande-Bretagne, when I noticed an issue of *Annales* lying on one of the tables. As I opened it at random it was borne in on me what a large part chance plays in our lives and that history is always repeating itself even in the career of diplomacy. This is what I read:

> . . . The Chevalier d'Éon, after his first successes, embarked upon a military career. The year was 1761, and the Seven Years War had already been raging for some time. He served in the Campaign of the Rhine as an officer of dragoons under Broglie against the English and Prussians, and covered himself with distinction.
>
> The next year he went to London on the staff of the French Ambassador, the Duc de Nivernais. Shortly afterwards he was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary, thus reaching the highest point of his fortunes. With the departure of the Duc de Nivernais he became Chargé d'Affaires. Intrigue, however, was rife and he was denounced as one of Broglie's creatures. Despite

himself he found that he had become involved in a Court conspiracy. He was deprived of his title of Minister and reduced to the position of secretary. The Duc de Praslin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, wrote him the following impertinent letter:

"I should never have believed that the title of Minister Plenipotentiary could so soon have made you forget the humbleness of your origins. . . ."

The Chevalier, wounded to the quick, replied without mincing his words:

"Sir,

I am in receipt of the letter you were good enough to send me. My origins were those of a gentleman, an officer, and a secretary of Embassy. In other countries these qualifications are considered sufficient to entitle a man to high diplomatic employment. . . . "

A few days later he was recalled by Praslin, and told to go straight to Paris without showing himself at Court, instructions tantamount to a sentence of exile. . . . By the same courier he received another letter, written in Louis XV's own hand, warning him that he would find that he had powerful enemies in France. Éon remained in London. Very soon the King began to be worried at the thought of this excitable fellow with so many dangerous documents in his possession being at large. . . . Guerchy, the new ambassador, was much embarrassed by the fact that the English law protected Éon and safeguarded his personal liberty. To have had him kidnapped would have provoked a serious scandal, for English public opinion would at once have been roused. Any demand for extradition would have been refused. The quarrel continued, and London was shortly treated to the curious spectacle of the French ambassador being formally accused by Éon of an attempt upon his life. Guerchy had to enlist the intervention of the King of England, George III, to put a stop to the proceedings, though, as a result, he was forced to leave the country. . . .

I had no documents in my possession. Nothing had been said to me, no orders had been issued, no replies made to my letters. A conspiracy to kidnap me had been set on foot which, in Athens and in 1937, unlike the similar attempt on Éon in London and in 1770, would have taken no account of protests. Once on board a Soviet ship I should have been on Russian territory.

The friend who had come to accompany me to the station interrupted my meditations. It was time to start.

Farewell sunny Greece, whose people, whose stones, whose isles and far-flung seas, had become so dear to me! Often will my mind go back to those peaceful scenes. When I went there first I thought that I had lost everything in life only to find that I had found a new hope, thanks to her who taught me to understand and feel the genius of the land. My gratitude to her can never be expressed.

In France, where I rejoined her, she has helped me through many a crisis, and kept alive in me the will to live and fight my battles.

A few weeks later, we read in the papers the account of a crime that had just been perpetrated in Lausanne. Ignace Reiss, a Polish Communist employed by the U.S.S.R. as a secret agent, had resigned his position, disgusted by the news of the Moscow executions. His letter of resignation, in which he announced his enlistment in the ranks of the Opposition, was first published in the columns of the Dutch Labour Press. It was couched in virulent terms: "Let there be no mistake," he wrote, "truth will prevail. The day of vengeance is nearer than those in the Kremlin think. . . . Nothing will be forgotten, nothing will be forgiven. The 'Leader of Genius', the 'Father of his People', the 'Sun of Socialism' will be called to account. When he stands his trial it will be in the broad light of day, and there will be no lack of witnesses living and dead. Each one of them will speak, and this time the truth, the whole truth, will be told. All will give evidence against the tyrant, those who have been wrongly accused, those who have been shot though innocent, and the Workers of the World will see to it that their names are cleared for ever. . . . Whoever holds his peace now is an accomplice of Stalin. . . ." Reiss himself repented of having so long kept silent. "Now, at last," he said, "my conscience is clear." How well I understood his feelings! A woman whom he had known since his childhood, one of the O.G.P.U. agents in Rome, joined him in Switzerland whither he had gone in the hope of finding peace with his wife and son. She lured him into a trap, and his body was found riddled with fifteen bullets, on the 4th of September on the road to Chamblandes. According to the papers the crime could be traced back to Moscow, to the office occupied by Ejov, which was in direct telephonic communication with Stalin's own room. It had cost its organisers 300,000 francs. It was stated that the Swiss and the French police had arrested several subordinate agents of the O.G.P.U., and knew the names of the murderers and of the men who had employed them.

I read the news in my hiding-place at Saint-Cloud. We noticed that those who were watching our movements made no attempt to conceal themselves. If I went into a tobacco kiosk I was followed. Strangers dogged my footsteps even in the Métro. My friends in Athens wrote that the Legation was maintaining complete silence about my disappearance. "They want to get rid of me quietly," I thought. . . . The news from the U.S.S.R. was always the same—accusations, arrests, executions. . . . In the course of a single month the last doubts which I might have had about what would have been my fate should I have returned to Moscow vanished. The whole world learned of the destruction of our Diplomatic Corps at the hands of the O.G.P.U. Rosenberg, ex-ambassador in Madrid was arrested; Iouréniev, ambassador in Berlin, was arrested; Davtian, ambassador in Warsaw, was arrested; Bigomolov, ambassador in Nanking, was arrested; Boris Podolsky, minister in Kaunas, was arrested; Asmus, minister in Helsingfors, was arrested; Beksadian, minister in Budapest, was arrested; Iakoubovitch, minister in Oslo, was arrested; Oustinov, minister in Tallinn, had died—in very suspicious circumstances. . . . Stalin was changing his staff, perhaps as a preliminary to changing his politics.

There were other reasons, too, why I felt myself to be in greater danger than I had been in Athens at the end of my stay there. I approached the French Socialists, who, I want to put on record, welcomed me most warmly. I should like to take this opportunity of expressing my thanks for their noble attitude, to two of the members of the Administrative Commission of the S.F.I.O., Marceau Pivert and Graziani. During the years of my service under Stalin, I had lost the habit of being in frank and direct contact with men who, though almost strangers, were moved by a sentiment of mutual respect, and united by a common ideal. I rediscovered the feeling of comradeship. We had thought we were alone, but found ourselves surrounded by sympathy and new friends. Most surprising of all, old friendships emerged once more. In Paris I met again Victor Serge, whom I had known at Leningrad in 1927 where he was already in opposition, already withdrawn from all active participation in the politics of the Communist International, quietly writing his books in the days before he was sent to prison. In his flat we had discussed the schemes for the first Five Year Plan. Banished from the U.S.S.R. in 1936, and escaping death only by the special favour of the gods, he continued to write as soon as he had freed himself from his criminal situation. He told me that all his relations in Russia, even his connexions by marriage, were in prison; that his father-in-law had died as a result of the persecution to which he was subjected, and that his wife had almost entirely lost her reason.

"But," he added, "you can see for yourself now how right we were."

Maurice Wullens, who for more than twenty years had been editing a little magazine of very militant views, to which Romain Rolland contributed during the war, gave us temporary hospitality. We used to sleep at his house, in the middle of a strange confusion made up of back numbers of art magazines, bundles of newspapers representing five or six different ideologies and reflecting thirty years of history, boxes of onions, sacks of beans, printers' stereos, and piles of books. The kindly humour and ironical good sense of our pamphleteering host with his gipsy beard, was a great change for me after the contacts I had known in the past when everyone was careful to watch his words, and even the expression of his face, so as to give no inkling of what he felt on hearing of the latest batch of executions. . . . I realised that, for many a long year, I had got out of the habit of speaking freely and except in a whisper. It was an extraordinary sensation once more to be able to talk and laugh without fear, to discuss everything I felt, every idea that came into my head.

I met Fédor Dan. I knew him well by name as one of the leaders of the Menshevik Party. Lenin, I had been informed, thought highly of him though he combated his views. In 1918, during the sittings of the first Soviet Executive, which had been a real revolutionary parliament, Dan, as leader of a legally recognised—and loyal—

Opposition, had had many a tussle with the men in power.

It was a joy to me to find in the attitude of this veteran of the Socialist movement cordial sincerity and a large tolerance, without the slightest suspicion of satisfaction at the knowledge that a man who, yesterday, had been his political opponent, was now suffering in defeat. He had been fighting for half a century, but I found in him an optimism and a spirit of combativeness of which I had not thought the Russian Social Democratic movement, at heart reformist and moderate, despite its many changes of mind and its tendency always to play the martyr's part, to be capable.

My old friend Boris Souvarin (whom, ever since 1922, I had remembered with peculiar affection for the energy and warmth of sympathy which he had shown in my regard at a difficult time) came to see me. Fifteen years had passed since our first meeting, but we recognised one another without difficulty. He found me still, he said, the same enthusiastic young Russian whom he had seen in the uniform of a Red officer. His temples showed grey, his smile, rough bitter and over-eloquent of disenchantment, was as full of life and as caustic as when in Moscow we had discussed politics at the time of the 4th Congress of the Komintern.

One day I was called upon by a young man dressed carelessly in the clothes of a Parisian workman, showing signs of premature exhaustion, but full of vitality, keen-witted, and ready at any excuse to break into a hearty laugh. This was Léon Sédov, Trotsky's son, who had been condemned time and time again in the Moscow courts. He was living now in a sixth-story lodging of the XVth *arrondissement* filled to bursting with files. Next door—as he found out later—dwelt an O.G.P.U. agent who dogged his every footstep, no matter what he might do to avoid observation. This fact became known only when the French police arrested the man in question on a charge of being concerned in the Reiss murder.

Sédov plied me with eager questions: "Tell me, how is it that anyone believes all these lies, all these ridiculous and faked-up charges? Did you believe them yourself a year ago?"

I interrogated him in my turn, and learned of horror after horror.

"They've no idea where I've been nor what my father's doing," he said. "But they've had their orders, so they get hold of witnesses who will swear that I was seen in Copenhagen—a city I've never been to—the very same day that thirty other people say that they met me in Berlin. . . ." Léon Sédov made a joke of it, but his tone was bitter. On many points we disagreed, but he wholeheartedly approved my determination to let nothing I might say injure our country, or lead anyone to suppose that the U.S.S.R. and the Stalin régime were identical.

"I'm very much afraid," I said laughing, "that Vichinsky, the Public Prosecutor, will make use of this meeting of ours to incriminate my friends. I can hardly deny having shaken hands with you."

Poor Léon Sédov! He was so bubbling over with schemes, so rich in the possession of a unique experience of history stretching over thirty years, and he died shortly afterwards from acute appendicitis in circumstances that have always remained rather obscure. . . . He was probably the last living child of the creator of the Red Army, for his brother Serge disappeared at Krasnoyarsk, whither he was deported last year after the newspapers had demanded the death penalty for crimes the very description of which savours of something imagined in a nightmare—"In that he was guilty of an attempt at gas poisoning *en masse* of the workers in the factory where he was employed. . . . ”

This chapter leaves me on the threshold of a new life which holds nothing of the past save the memories I am about to relate. It ends in a machine-shop situated in the Paris suburbs, where, thanks to my knowledge of motor-cars, I have found work. . . . To a French writer, formerly my guest in Athens, who entertained me in Paris and, while expressing amazement on hearing that I had broken with my government, asked me what I was going to do now, I replied in the following words:

“Many Russian generals, who once fought against us and were beaten, have been reduced to finding manual employment in Paris. . . . Compared with them I have this advantage, that I was a workman before ever I became an officer and a diplomat. I have this further advantage, that I am not a defeated reactionary, but a man who cries aloud his accusation of the régime established by Stalin, and of the illimitable sufferings which it has caused my country.”

I work with eight others. Four of them are Socialists. They know nothing of me beyond the fact that I am a political refugee. They couldn’t help noticing that I had got out of the way of using my hands, and in helping me to overcome this difficulty they have given evidence of a spirit of comradeship which has moved me profoundly. They have asked me no questions. I have found in them more instinctive tact than I ever did in those with whom I lived in the world of Diplomacy.

SECOND PART

La gloire était leur nourriture,
Ils allaient sans pain sans souliers,
La nuit ils couchaient sur la dure
Avec leurs sacs pour oreillers.

Popular song on the Soldiers
of the French Revolution

CHAPTER III

CHILDHOOD

I NEVER knew my parents well, and lived with them scarcely at all; on the occasions when we *were* together they left me severely to myself. It may well be that the impressions of life which I early gained with them had considerable influence on the development of my character. There was never a time when I was not familiar with difficulties, crises, and the necessity of surmounting obstacles, and this fact, since the age was a restless one, no doubt made of me a natural revolutionary. My case was not isolated; in fact, the life I led was that of many Russians of my generation, which makes me think that my memories and my experience may help readers to understand what has happened in my country, what I and my fellows were instrumental in achieving, the why and the wherefore of our period.

My mother, one of a gamekeeper's eighteen children, had grown up in a village, knowing nothing but work and discomfort—though never actual shortage of food. Ever since she was sixteen she had looked after her smaller brothers and sisters, keeping their bodies clean and their stomachs filled. The fact that all eighteen reached maturity shows that the conditions of life, though straitened, were not bad. When she was fifteen her mother had worked for a certain Countess Brannitzkaya, pulling beetroot from dawn till nightfall in the fields for a wage of twenty-five kopecks a day. At seventeen she married a schoolmaster, a widower considerably older than herself. Was she happy? I can remember noisy quarrels between her and my father accompanied by much slamming of doors in our little cottage, and days of terror when we were all expecting to be "distrained upon". In preparation for this terrible possibility my mother would spend the night packing various bundles, which she then carried off after getting them out of the house, not by the door, but through the kitchen window which gave on to the courtyard. When this happened I used to be taken to the house of some neighbours. My parents would be away for a long time and then come back for short spells in a mood of modified happiness—if indeed it was happiness. How was I to know?

Finally, they sent me to live with my grandfather and grandmother. I made the mysterious journey with my mother, through green lanes, by fields and forests. We crossed several rivers on rafts. Everything was new and confusing. My grandparents lived in an old house full of children in the heart of the country. When times were difficult they gave shelter to all their relations. The house was white, surrounded by cherry trees, and situated some little distance from a small town of the Ukraine, which had a Jewish quarter. This town was a gloomy place though bathed in sunshine all through the summer and dotted with gardens. It squatted, as it were, on the bank of a river, was badly tended, and, in places, stinking. Grandmamma spent all her time in the kitchen in front of the fire, surrounded by pots, pans and dishes. She had passed her whole life thus, bearing her eighteen children one after the other, nursing them, keeping them alive. She had managed it, but only by dint of solving endless problems, and I used often to see her seated in front of a sheet of paper, a pencil in her hand, doing her accounts aloud—"So much for cucumbers, so much for soap—and how much for sugar?" She worked wonders, and our lives were a continual miracle. We had sugar, and, on special occasions, even boots and clean blouses. . . . We formed a sort of independent republic, girls and boys of all ages, with running noses, dirty faces, ragged breeches and tangled hair. We spent our days in the open air, climbing trees, swimming, and exploring the countryside within the radius of a mile from our home.

Rain storms were our delight. As soon as we saw the clouds gather we prepared for fun, and when they burst in a deluge of water we rushed naked into the yard where we proceeded to indulge in a Red Indian dance, the rain streaming off our bodies. The heavier storms did considerable damage to the house. Grandpapa would clear a corner of the yard and fetch clay from the river bank. Meanwhile, we children would go out and collect dung from the road. Clay and dung mixed with water, and pounded deliciously by our bare feet, made an excellent building material with which to plaster the walls. Grandmamma took the opportunity thus offered to renew the whitewash on the thatch. Along the edge of the roof she picked out an ornamental border in blue. When the work was done, the whole house looked new.

The local market was a thrilling place. Horses and carts came in from all parts of the countryside. There were mountains of fruit and vegetables; there were fortune-tellers and sideshows, stalls where one could buy such rare delights as tops and coloured cloth. Strangers from distant villages were thick on the ground, and business was done to an accompaniment of busy clamour. We would stand, all eyes, before a little booth on which were displayed marvellous little books with illustrated wrappers, containing collections of old Russian tales, or before others adorned with piles of acid-drops, highly coloured cakes and cocks made of barley-sugar. . . . I have never forgotten these memories of childish treasure-trove. A bucketful of cherries, a sack of potatoes or of pears, cost five kopecks: for one kopeck one could get a couple of huge water-melons. . . . These prices sound marvellous to-day when we are used to paying four roubles for a kilo of cherries and two roubles for a melon. . . . Not that we ever knew a surfeit of food; there were too many mouths to be filled, and for days together we would live on thin gruel.

Grandpapa came back from work at nightfall, and set off again at dawn. In the evenings he did rough jobs about the house, splitting logs or mending the fence. We children enjoyed complete liberty, on condition that we did not whine or quarrel. If one of us came in with a black eye or torn clothes Grandpapa would growl out: "If you're too small to fight, don't do it! . . . Go and wash your face." He was a sort of kindly patriarch who saw life as something very crude and very simple. Only once did he ever punish me, and the occasion has remained vividly in my memory.

I happened to be very hungry. We were all seated round the table, a hoard of little grubby creatures, our eyes bright from a day in the open air and the prospect of food. A streaming tureen of soup stood before us, and we were waiting with our wooden spoons in our hands until, as good manners dictated, Grandmamma and Grandpapa should have helped themselves first (there was no room in our poor country life for individual plates, but I can assure you that we did not miss them). So impatient was I that I was led to commit a grave breach of manners, and guilty conscience, no doubt, made me clumsy. I waited for nobody, but leaned across the table and took the first spoonful. . . . What can it have been but the prickings of remorse that made me slip? There I was, stretching across and plunging my spoon into the soup, when, all of a sudden, I upset the whole tureen and sent the scalding contents all over the legs of my younger brothers and sisters. The disaster was instantaneous and complete. Cries of pain and horror bore witness to its appalling nature. So terrified was I at the thought that I had been the cause of it, that I was quite unconscious of any pain.

Grandpapa got up with a thunderous expression on his face. "Come with me," he said. Grandmamma put in a gentle plea for mercy: "Nikifor, don't beat the child . . .", but Grandpapa said nothing. He knew what he'd got to do. We went into the next room and he shut the door. Then, sitting down, and, taking my head between his knees, he administered to my behind such a walloping with his leather slipper that I felt all on fire. But I made no sound and shed no tear. I was overwhelmed with shame and knew that I had deserved this terrible punishment. With flaming cheeks and ears I returned to the other room, not daring to look at anybody. Grandmamma bathed my burns with curdled milk and bound them up. The other children laughed at me. When, a little later, I was summoned to table to take my share of a new supply of soup, I burst into tears and refused to go. To this day, whenever I think of that scene, I have a strong sense of guilt. . . . For a long time I never took my soup until everybody else was served, a habit that was to come in useful in the rough life that lay ahead.

A day came when my mother arrived, looking young and pretty and dressed in city clothes of a kind we hardly ever saw. She had brought presents for everybody, and had come to take me away to school. I distributed among my cousins all my treasures, both known and secret, empty match and cigarette boxes, catapults, knucklebones, stones of curious shapes, nails. . . . It was a solemn occasion, in no wise lessened by the fact that several of us were ill as a result of eating some poisonous berries. Grandpapa, I remember, gave me a lesson in courage when he suggested that I should drink of my own accord the frightful emetic merely to look at which gave me the shudders. For the rest of my life I was to remember that a man must never let himself be compelled to drink even the most loathsome medicines, but must always raise the cup to his lips of his own free will.

No one was waiting for us at Vilna railway station. My mother was living alone. To my questions about papa she replied evasively. Our home was two rooms, tiny but clean. My mother was working in a hospital, from which she came back very late. I was a good pupil at the school to which I went, but retiring and given to solitude. I began to read with avidity every book I could lay hands on—Fenimore Cooper, Jules Verne, Maine Reid, Captain Marryat, Stevenson, Jack London and Kipling. A little later I developed a taste for Pushkin, Victor Hugo, Zola, Turgéniev, Tolstoy and Dickens. . . . One day my mother found me deep in a translation of Maupassant. "Don't read that," she said sternly; "there are a lot of things in it you can't possibly understand. . . ." This was rather a shock to me, since I was at the age when a boy thinks there is nothing he cannot understand. As a result I read Maupassant with increased attention, searching high and low in the town for a complete edition of his works.

Books gave richness to a life which, in material matters, was becoming more and more straitened. I learned by chance that my father had "gone with another woman". He continued to pay for my keep, though at very irregular intervals. My mother suffered in silence. I understood her, but said nothing. This attitude of reserve on both sides brought into our relationship a degree of sadness which developed into a sort of estrangement. She reproached me with lack of affection, but I could think of nothing to say, and subsisted with increasing bitterness on my wordless thoughts. In this way I lived until I was fourteen.

"Would you like to go and live with your father?" she asked me one day.

At the idea of getting to know a new town, a new world, of seeing my father once again, I became so excited that I flung my arms round her neck.

"Oh yes!" I cried. I could see from the expression of her face that I had hurt her, and I tried to make up for what I had said. "But I'll come back, mamma, and then we'll live together. . . ."

My efforts were only half successful, and when I went away I carried with me the thought of my mother's wounded heart.

My father met me at Gomel railway station. We went home to a comfortable house standing in a garden. No sooner had we arrived than he led me into his study where he solemnly looked me over with a rather embarrassed air. "You're quite a man now," he said. "I can talk to you openly. I have married again. You've got a little brother. You must see him—and your stepmother." Then he called: "Katia!"

The woman who came in, carrying a child in her arms, reminded me of figures I had seen in reproductions of Dutch pictures. I had never known until now that they could exist in real life. My "second mother" had a full face, a rather snub nose, and large grey, laughing eyes. . . . She was of a cheerful disposition, but I soon came to realise that beneath her comely appearance there lurked a mean and calculating spirit.

"Give your hand to your great big brother," she said to the baby, while she fondled my head. My youngest brother immediately began to cry. . . .

The first months passed agreeably enough; then I began to realise that I was *de trop*. My stepmother obviously regarded every mouthful of bread that I ate as so much food snatched from her precious infant.

The small amount of pocket-money which my father gave me for the cinema and for personal expenses became a subject of bitter recrimination. He hit on the ingenious plan of making me work for what he gave me so that he could plead, as an excuse for his payments, that a labourer was worthy of his hire. I made cigarettes for him at the rate of 15 kopecks a box. He taught me also how to use a saw and a woodman's axe—accomplishments which were, later, to serve me in good stead. . . . Hard work with both implements on large tree-trunks brought me in a rouble a week—enough for the cinema and other amusements. . . .

My school-work went well, but what was bound to happen sooner or later, happened. It was made clear to me that there was no room for a stranger in my father's new family. One day he called me into his study and told me with a good deal of humming and hawing that I should be better off with my real mother, who lived too solitary a life.

"You are going to-morrow. I have warned her of your arrival by telegram."

Was there no place for me then anywhere? I made no answer to what my father had said, but I was conscious of a feeling of despair—which, on no account, must I reveal to a living soul. I turned for comfort to dreams. When I grew up I would be a sailor, an explorer—rich and famous. Then they would *all* want me to go and live with them. I would bring my mother and father together again and they would never realise that that was my way of getting my own back! Never again would I allow them to quarrel and sulk. . . .

Another disappointment was awaiting me at Vilna. My mother, too, was thinking of getting married again. When she broke the news to me I begged her to abandon the idea. "You'll only be unhappy again, mamma," I said. "Let's live together, just we two; it'll be so much nicer. . . ."

On the day of her marriage—which took place while I was at school—we moved to new and much more comfortable quarters. It was with a feeling of depression, however, that I took possession of my new room. My books, in corded piles, stood about the floor—all that remained of the life I had known so well but yesterday. On the floor below the wedding festivities were at their height. Several times my mother came to fetch me, but I would not go down. "This attitude of yours hurts me deeply," she said; "don't be so obstinate—come along!" But I was too much occupied with my own sense of injury to listen to her. I lay down fully dressed on the bed and fell asleep in a mood of confused and troubled sensibility. When I awoke I found on the night-table a few cakes and a plate of ice-cream. The ice had melted, and all that remained was a yellowish liquid. I suddenly remembered the festivities of the previous evening and could not restrain my tears. I could not bear to think that I might ever be on terms of affection with my stepfather, though I knew him to be a decent fellow.

I have very few pleasant memories of school, where the dry, aloof, attitude of the masters was calculated to smother any natural aptitude for the joys of learning.

I should like, however, to take this opportunity of painting at full length the portrait of a man who exercised on me a beneficent influence. I refer to the Protestant clergyman who taught us German by an extremely original method of his own, which took the form of giving us as prizes for our literary compositions, sweets which he bought out of his own pocket. He was a cheerful, if rather nervous, man with nothing of the professional solemnity of the ecclesiastic about him, and he always wore light-coloured suits. Dullness and he could not live in the same classroom. It was the rule of the school that he should be greeted each morning by a sort of chant in unison of the words "*Guten Morgen, Lieber Pastor!*" and I can assure you that the boys performed the exercise with a will! The good man had only to appear for there to be such a manifestation of delight that serious work became quite impossible for at least a quarter of an hour. It was while sharing out a prize of chocolate given by our *Lieber Pastor*, that I made my first friend, a member of my own form called Kousskov. The thought of him brings to my mind the events which sent our two lives in such different directions.

One day in the summer of 1914 I went on a visit to the villa in the woods where Kousskov lived. I found it empty and gloomy as only houses can be which are made for summer holidays and should know only happiness, laughter and fun. I waited in vain the whole of one day and the night following. My friend and his family never arrived. I was filled with a mingled sense of sadness and anxiety. . . . I suddenly remembered that when I got out at the station the news-boy had been crying something strange and unexpected—"Mobilisation decreed!". . . . On getting into the train to go back I was struck by the strange looks on the faces round me, by the excited talk that I heard on all sides. . . .

"What is happening, sir?" I asked one of my fellow travellers.

"My boy," he answered, "what's happening is that we are going to fight a war and give the Kaiser a punch on the nose. Our Cossacks'll be in Berlin in no time."

In the books I had read war was always represented as something heroic and inevitably victorious. I realised, therefore, that henceforward life would be like an exciting novel. Everyone seemed to be in the best of spirits, and I shared their happiness in spite of the fact that my friend's parents had evidently given up the idea of a summer. holiday.

The next day my stepfather came home in a mood of high elation, his eyes shining. "God be thanked!" he said. "This means war! Russia will be victorious!" The streets were full of processions carrying tricolour flags, church banners and portraits of the Tsar displayed on shining white napkins. The air was charged with emotion. The crowds sang. I went to the barracks to watch the crowds of young peasants who had been called up. War! Everyone seemed to realise that we were on the threshold of stupendous happenings. Cossacks clattering down the streets on their horses were greeted with cheers and volleys of flowers. At school our class uttered an "Oh!" of horrified amazement when the news came that little Belgium had been invaded by the German hordes. Never mind, our Cossacks would soon free Belgium! Why wasn't I big enough to join the army? Everything would be over long before I reached military age. Fate was unfair! The first German prisoners passed through the town. We ran to get a look at them. To me they seemed not terrible at all, but merely pitiful. Dirty and exhausted, they returned our stares with smiles. These invaders of Belgium looked as though they didn't so very much mind being taken prisoner! They made friendly signs to us, and called out, "*Kinder! Kinder!*" It occurred to me that they too might have children of just our age. One of my companions shouted, "*Deutsche Schweine!*" The prisoners looked away. Since we had no feeling of hatred in our hearts, we felt vaguely ashamed of what our companion had said.

CHAPTER IV

WAR AND REVOLUTION

THE war drew out its tedious length. We began to forget what peace had been like. Our army won several victories and made large quantities of prisoners. But there was no longer any talk of the Cossacks entering Berlin. On the contrary, it was the Uhlans who entered Warsaw. The Germans occupied the whole of Poland and threatened Lithuania. It was all very difficult to understand. My elders put on smart uniforms and made plans for the future, among them Nicolas and Gregory, my two brothers, sons like myself of my father's first marriage. I saw them on their way to the front. They were as proud as peacocks of their N.C.O.'s stripes.

The younger, Gregory, was killed on the 1st of August 1915, aged nineteen. In the autumn my mother gave up going to work. "We shall be refugees," she told me; "they are evacuating the town. . . ."

I knew the awful lot of refugees. Was that to be our fate too? Evacuation, when it came, however, was carried out in comfortable conditions, by train. Despite the confusion of the roads and the chaos reigning at the railway stations, we managed to take almost all our possessions with us. The journey lasted six days, six weary days during which we were confined in a goods truck. Finally we reached Gomel. And so it was that chance decreed the meeting of my two families.

It was a black period for me! There was I, between the two of them, on one side my father with a new wife, on the other my mother with a new husband. Nobody wanted me: I was left in a terrible loneliness. Every word wounded me, and some of the things that were said were really wounding. When, at meal-times, my mother picked out a scrap of meat for me, her hand trembled under her husband's disapproving gaze, for meat was scarce and dear and he thought that my own father ought to be responsible for my keep. What crime had I committed? What had I done to deserve this loneliness and this treatment? One evening I could stand it no longer. I didn't go home. I wandered round the station, sought shelter in an empty truck, and spent the night sleeping in the waiting-room. I made up my mind that I would never go home again. I would find a lodging with friends; I would look for work; no longer would I endure the humiliation of knowing that every mouthful I ate was the object of hostile glances.

I found a refuge with the parents of my friend Kousskov, living, like myself, at Gomel as refugees. To spare my pride they asked me to help their youngest daughter with her school-work. I thus became a tutor at fifteen.

One day the newspapers published special editions which were eagerly snatched in the streets. There were no policemen to be seen. Instead, a lot of young people appeared in the town armed with rifles and wearing on their sleeves red brassards with the letters V.M.—volunteer militia. The authorities displayed notices to the effect that the Emperor Nicholas II had abdicated. The strains of the *Marseillaise* were heard in the public squares. A few of the boys at school sported red ribbons. At first the headmaster tried to make them take them off on the ground that they were a "breach of school rules". But he soon gave up the attempt, and this incident made us realise that important things were happening. That Sunday the weekly review of the garrison took place as usual, but the Commanding Officer wore a red rosette on his tunic, the band played the *Marseillaise* instead of

God Save the Tsar, and the troops took the oath of allegiance to the Provisional Government. A gentleman made a speech about the necessity of defending our liberty against the Teutons, and of carrying the war to final victory.

New papers appeared. We began to hear of political parties till then unknown. The workmen and the soldiers of the garrison formed a Soviet, the majority of whose members were Social Democrats. The older boys at school wanted to have a Soviet too. They demanded a relaxation of school discipline. . . . What was much better, a plan was set on foot for the creation of a Youth Hostel, equipped with a library and a reading-room. It was in this connexion that I made my first acquaintance with a real flesh and blood Bolshevik. The mere word was fraught with an almost abusive connotation. These "Bolsheviks" were dangerous enemies of our country who had passed through Germany with the consent of the foe. They announced that they were opposed to the policy of continuing the war until a final victory was gained—that uncompromising war about which there was more talk than ever. During the debate on funds for our library, a Bolshevik student called Model took the floor and began to complain of the partisan way in which the money was being administered. There were no copies of *Pravda* in the reading-room! His voice was drowned in cries of "Kick him out, dirty Leninist!" but he stuck to his point, demanded a vote, and got his way. His courage delighted me. The name Lenin stuck in my memory.

I had wanted for a long time to earn my own living. The municipality was preparing to issue bread-cards and wanted assistants. I signed on. In addition to this, I offered my services to some neighbours for the purpose of cutting wood. I knew all about the use of the axe. In

LENIN

the evening my hands were covered with blisters, but I had made four roubles. Very soon my savings amounted to the staggering sum of fifty roubles! What was I to do with them except to use them as a means of seeing the world? I dreamed of Niagara Falls and the snows of Alaska, but, alas, the Revolution had brought them no nearer! On the other hand, it might be possible to visit the Falls of Imatra in Finland. On my way there I could visit the two capitals, Moscow and Petrograd. My mother succeeded in getting me a free tourist ticket for the summer holidays—and I started.

I realise now that the train in which I found myself was in the true revolutionary tradition. I took with me a change of linen and a few cakes and apples—last minute gifts from my mother. I found a comfortable seat in an upper bunk of a sleeper in which a lot of soldiers were playing cards. At each stop the carriage, already filled to capacity, was invaded by newcomers. Even the lavatories were occupied, and as for the corridors, it was almost impossible to move down them. All the glass had been smashed and people climbed in through the window apertures. Two soldiers pushed me firmly but not roughly against the partition, and proceeded to share my allowance of seat between them. Everybody was talking, swearing, elbowing, and smoking unimaginably rank tobacco. An attempt to force an entry into the next-door compartment failed lamentably. It contained a number of officers, who spent the rest of the journey besieged by a violently hostile mob. The best that could be said for our party was that quarrels were few and far between. When we reached Moscow I found out that a number of people, most of them soldiers, had made the journey on the roofs of the coaches. They were black with soot and coal-dust and tanned by the sun. They told us that two soldiers had been killed as a result of raising their heads when the train was passing under a bridge.

My impression of Moscow was that it was enormous, rather rustic, and filthily dirty. Everywhere one went pamphlets were being distributed; the eye was caught at every step by posters displayed by the Liberals and the Revolutionary Socialists. Meetings were being held in the public squares. I stayed with a friend of my mother's whose husband, a railwayman, had discovered that he was a Bolshevik. When he spoke of Kerensky's Provisional Government he didn't mince his words. "The politicians haven't had their fill of blood yet, but this time what they want is the blood of the workers and peasants," he would exclaim. "If the speculators and the bourgeois want this final victory of theirs, they'd better go and get it themselves!" The violence of his hatred staggered me. I passed one whole day at the Trétiakov Gallery where I was deeply moved by Répine's famous picture of Ivan the Terrible embracing in despair the body of the son he has just killed.

The journey from Moscow to Petrograd was almost exactly similar to my former railway experience. . . . Despite the vast city's emptiness and filth I could not but be impressed by its architectural beauties. I hunted out the Bronze Horseman with which I had become familiar through Pushkin's poetry, the equestrian statue of Tsar Peter vanquishing the serpent. It seemed to me to be less imposing than the verses had led me to expect.

I paid a call on some distant relatives. My cousins opened the door. They received me very kindly, offered to show me the city, and then suddenly burst out with:

"Your poor father! What a terrible thing for him!"

What was this terrible thing they were talking of? My aunt, amazed at my ignorance, explained. My eldest brother Nicolas had just been killed on the Rumanian front. The poor fellow left a widow and a baby. . . . I began to understand the meaning of war.

Vyborg was the first city of Western Europe I had ever seen, for Russia belongs both to Asia and to Europe, and is closer in spirit to the former. I found it a severe-looking city, with its house-fronts of grey granite, but amazingly clean. The huge station was brightly lit, the crystal chandeliers illuminating table-cloths of a dazzling whiteness. Metal currency was still in circulation. It had long been forgotten in Russia, and its place taken by pieces of pasteboard looking like postage stamps and printed with the Emperor's likeness. . . . Life in Finland was very calm, its prosperity disconcerting. Its people were not involved in the war and gave the impression of not taking the slightest interest in the Russian drama. I was deeply impressed to feel myself so indubitably among foreigners, a feeling increased by the fact that I could not surmount the barrier of their language. The Falls of Imatra, on the other hand, disappointed me. My imagination had conceived something more grandiose than this spectacle of a seething torrent tumbling down to the little iron bridge where I stood to observe the watery magnificence. I had not yet learned that power is not always to be judged by its external signs.

I returned to Petrograd without a penny, having only just escaped being turned off the train, since my ticket did not entitle me to the round trip. The intervention of a kindly stranger who lent me the necessary small sum, spared me this inconvenience. In the course of the journey I saw, at a station we passed through, the women's battalion which was soon to be the Provisional Government's last line of defence against the Bolshevik insurrection. The genuine soldiers on the train gazed with undisguised hostility at these beardless, over-smart warriors, who were carrying out the minutiae of army life with a sort of musical comedy meticulousness. The women, however, pretended not to hear the extremely coarse oaths that rose on every side.

I got back to Gomel without any further adventure more serious than a petty theft. I had gone hungry to sleep wondering whether, when I woke, I should spend my last farthing on a paper or a roll, only to find next morning that my purse had vanished, and with it the problem of having to choose between food for the body or food for the mind. I was sorry for the thief, whose disappointment must have been far greater than mine. For the whole of the last day of my journey I ate nothing. . . .

I decided that I must get work to do, and joined up with a gang just setting off for the forests to cut timber. "No pay," I was told, "but you get your keep. . . ." That seemed good enough for me. We travelled by boat down various canals. When we arrived we had to build living-quarters for ourselves, and, that done, cut a set quantity of wood, working in three shifts, each day. At first the task took us ten hours, and when our turn for rest came our hands were raw and bleeding. By degrees, however, we got used to the rough labour and reduced our time to about six hours. . . . The trees with their load of leafy boughs fell beneath our strokes with a noise of breaking waves, and we cut them up, working in a dense world of foliage filled with the scent of sap. . . . Work over I used to wander with a single friend into the silent countryside, while our young fellow workmen went off courting the girls of the neighbourhood—expeditions from which they often returned with scarred faces.

My friend urged me to go with him to the great city of Kiev, and suggested that we should hide ourselves on some steamer making the journey. At first we were successful enough, but having been foolish enough to go ashore with the regular passengers at one of the stopping-places, we found it impossible to get on board again. Luckily we were without luggage! We found a barge the crew of which were willing to take us with them. This vessel was in charge of a jolly old peasant who made a lot of fun about our being so tall and slim, calling us a "couple of young toffs" and grumbling into his beard. "Fine dockers you'll make!" he would say. We took him at his word. "All right," we answered, "just you wait and see." And sure enough, when we got to Kiev we started unloading the newly arrived barges. And devilishly heavy the sacks of flour were, covering one with white powder from head to foot and almost breaking one's back! They had a disconcerting way of seeming to get a stranglehold on one's spine, too, which was particularly unpleasant. I never knew before how exhausted the human frame could be. The attitude of the regular stevedores had at first been hostile and suspicious, but our manifest good will soon made them our friends.

I worked at many jobs while I was growing up. I exchanged dockside labour for a most unpleasant and grubby spell in a second-hand uniform factory, mending up old tunics, after which I was taken on in some minor capacity by the municipal authorities and set to do clerical work. All this while, however, I kept on cramming for my school examinations.

In November 1917 a day came when we heard the unaccustomed sound of gunfire and of a motor-engine in the sky above our heads. From the streets we watched the single aeroplane in Government possession circling above Kiev.

"The Bolsheviks have engineered a rising and occupied the Arsenal. . . . In Petrograd the two German agents, Lenin and Trotsky, have provoked an armed outbreak and have set up a government of sorts. Kerensky is massing troops in the suburbs; order will be restored in a few days. . . ." Such was the news that reached us. At this time the Ukraine had a Republican Government of its own, that was to all intents and purposes, independent. It was known as the Rada, and its President, the writer Vinnitchenko, was later replaced by Simeon Petlura, who had been one of his subordinates. The Russian section of the population was strongly hostile to him for two diametrically opposed reasons: the workers disliking him because of their sympathy for the Bolsheviks, the officials and Russian merchants because they hoped for a nation-wide counter-revolution. The immediate unrest soon simmered down, but the atmosphere remained tense. The municipal employees, of whom I was one, even declared a strike, though this "white-collar" movement was the subject of much mirth. The Ukraine was making a violent effort to organise an army of its own, and uniforms were being improvised, based upon the traditional costume of the countryside—wide trousers and Cossack caps adorned with yellow and blue favours. We were full of admiration for this military finery. One of my class-mates, however, a serious young fellow with a shock of fair hair, had undertaken, without much reluctance on my part, to educate me politically. He was always making sarcastic remarks about the new uniforms. His name was Levine: I did not know at the time that he was a member of a Bolshevik organisation.

CHAPTER V

INVASIONS

WITH the coming of winter our privations increased. The Bolsheviks had now been in power for three months. From day to day we expected to hear that they had been overthrown. Trotsky was negotiating with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk. We young people discussed the situation among ourselves, and it seemed to us very odd. The Bolshevik miners of the Donetz basin had seized control and were organising Red troops. In the Kiev factories the workers were talking quite openly of getting rid of the Rada and setting up a Soviet government.

In the middle of January work suddenly came to a standstill all over the city. For some time we had never been without a strike of some sort. The Rada published *communiqués*, in which it declared that its army was carrying on a victorious resistance, but there were rumours that the Ukrainians were retreating before the Red troops. Suddenly the city was full of the sound of gunfire. Once again there had been an outbreak at the Arsenal. The rattle of rifles could be heard at every street corner. From some vague remarks made by Levine I gathered that the Bolsheviks were staging something. I wanted to be with my friend. At the sound of fighting I went out into the streets. The whine of bullets and their *slap, slap* against the brickwork, kept me creeping along by the walls. I caught sight of my landlady, her eyes red with weeping. In querulous tones she asked: "Where is Vassili Petrovitch?" Her husband, a workman employed at the Arsenal, had not come home. . . . He never did come home, and we never knew what had happened to him. All over the city housewives were sticking strips of paper over their windows to prevent them being shattered by the vibration set up by the big guns. It is an excellent precautionary measure, and was always adopted in the villages behind the front during the war. I strongly recommend it.

I went out with Levine. Bullets were flying all over the place, though no one knew whence, nor by whom, they were being fired. They did not prevent people collecting in crowds before the local bakers' shops. There was a rumour that armed men were looting houses in the next street. That night the doors were barricaded and a system of sentries instituted. It was impossible to get into a house without first being carefully scrutinised through a peephole in the door. That done, an old woman and a man, armed with ancient revolvers, would open it just enough to let you slip through. . . . On the fifth day the fighting stopped as though by magic. I heard somebody say, "The Bolsheviks have been smashed!" We went out again and started exploring the city. Some disembowelled horses were lying at a near-by crossroads. The first corpse we saw was stretched out on the pavement. It was the body of a young soldier. His face was a greenish colour and his head had been shattered. His brains lay scattered over the asphalt. Somebody had removed his boots and his naked feet looked blue. Moved by a superstitious respect we gave this body a wide berth. Near the station our attention was drawn to some abandoned lorries. Children were clambering over them hunting for cartridges and small shells. They took the powder from these latter and used it for making fireworks which they let off in the narrow alleys. . . . My landlady returned, worn out and with puffy eyes. Fifteen hundred Bolshevik workmen had been massacred at the Arsenal. The whole city was in mourning. Suddenly the guns started booming again.

The Red Army, led by Mouraviev, Sivers and Stchors, was drawing inexorably nearer and nearer. The workers at the Arsenal had planned their rising a week too early. Six days later they could have seized the city without any bloodshed. I remember a woman coming to the house and saying: "The Petlurians have cleared out!" Simeon Petlura, a National Socialist schoolmaster, was now head of the Republican Government of the Ukraine. It wandered about to such an extent that it soon became a schoolboy joke to say:

"The Government's in the train
The Country's underneath. . . ."

"Let's go and see," said I to my friend, "whether the Reds are here yet."

A crowd, mostly composed of working people, filled the main street, vaguely waiting for something to happen. Horses' hoofs sounded in the distance, and a squadron of cavalry, without any distinguishing marks and dressed in the long grey cloaks common to all armies, came suddenly in sight, advanced as far as the public square, and beat a hurried retreat. Then an armoured car with two turrets appeared. It halted in the square, and two sunburnt men, wearing red brassards on their sleeves, got out. The Reds! The Reds! The crowd swarmed round them. A few thin, pale women started to shout: "Do you know what happened at the Arsenal?—shot, the whole lot of 'em!" Some horsemen now came up. A meeting was improvised round the pedestal of a statue from which the bronze figure had been removed. A man, bare-headed, and with an energetic face, clambered up and started shouting a lot of harsh phrases which went straight to the hearts of his listeners.

"Comrades, Kiev has been freed by the Red Army of

Workmen and Peasants who have risen in revolt. Comrades, the power of the Soviets brings you——"

It was only later that I heard that this was Skrypnik, a member of the Central Bolshevik Committee, and Commissar in Mouraviev's army. (Colonel Mouraviev, one of the first of the Red Army leaders, was killed this very year in which I am writing, in the Volga province, attempting to organize a revolt against the central power of the Soviets; Skrypnik, who later became one of the most influential of all the People's Commissars in the Ukraine, and a faithful collaborator of Stalin, was abandoned by the latter, and committed suicide in 1934.) . . . A little further on parties of Red soldiers were engaged in scrutinising the papers of those going towards the suburbs. We witnessed the following scene. A couple went up to one of the sentry posts. The man was dressed as a workman. His papers were in order. They moved on, but the soldier in charge, who had been following them narrowly with his eyes, called them back. Very roughly he tore open the man's overcoat, and, as he expected, discovered a pair of epaulettes. "Take him away!" he said, and two soldiers led him off, while the woman, not yet understanding the tragedy that had fallen upon them, cried out: "What's the matter, dear?" Four hundred officers were shot at the Arsenal as a reprisal for the massacre of the workmen. Blood calls for blood. This was merely a beginning.

At the end of five weeks Mouraviev's Red Army had to retreat before the advance of the Ukraino-German forces. The city quickly emptied of Soviet troops, and changed hands without a shot being fired. At school a rumour was passed from mouth to mouth: the Germans are here! There was something magnificent in the thought that after fighting for four years against the whole world, they had now penetrated into the heart of the

Ukraine. The next day I noticed an extraordinary change in the appearance of the railway station. Ever since 1917 it had been deserted, ruined, and incredibly filthy. . . . Parties of soldiers were busy scrubbing the floors, wiping down the walls, and pasting up new notices in German. Everywhere there was a smell of soap and a marvellous sense of order and discipline. People gazed on what had happened with stupefaction. Many odd things had occurred since the Revolution, but nothing so odd as this sudden cleansing! An officer wearing a helmet appeared, his buttons bright, his boots shining, and the soldiers, wash-rags in hand, saluted him in the most surprising way. . . . Kiev was quick to feel the effects of this dictatorship of cleanliness. Even the masters at school appeared in form freshly shaved. Sometimes we caught sight in the streets of the Hetman, Pavlo Skoropadsky, head of the new independent Ukraine, and a protégé of the Kaiser, passing in a car. He was a man of mature age, dressed in a handsome white uniform and wearing the Cross of St. George, a decoration of the old régime. The local illustrated papers were now printed in Berlin, and a quantity of Ukrainian bank-notes, produced also in Berlin, came into circulation.

My schooldays were drawing to a close. The headmaster found me a position as tutor in the family of an innkeeper called Petrichenko. My work consisted in preparing his son, a pale, shifty-looking youth, for the upper form. In return for this I got my board and lodging. My pupil at first showed signs of quite abnormal stupidity. One day, when he came home with his usual bad report, his father took him into the stable to give him a beating. From beyond the manure heap in the yard I could hear the wretched boy's cries, and I realised that his backwardness was a form of unconscious and passive resistance to brutal treatment. Petrichenko said to me:

"Don't spare the rod. Just tell me, and I'll give him a good hiding whenever you wish. . . ." But I made this earnest seeker after vicarious education promise me that he would give up using violence to his son. The boy developed for me a sort of grateful passion. "I'll answer for him," I had said rather rashly, and he set himself to justify my confidence. We worked hard together. As soon as the fear of punishment was taken from him his notes showed a marked improvement.

The family regarded me with the deepest respect, though not, unfortunately, to the extent of providing me with a new pair of shoes. In my emotion as I think of those shoes, I find the whole drama of that winter summed up and made vivid. Shadows though they were of their former selves, I had nothing else to protect my feet against the mud and snow. . . . Thanks, however, to Petrichenko's soup I managed to pass my final examinations with the other boys of my year. There were the customary festivities, the usual distribution of "matriculation" medals bearing the two dates, June 1918—June 1928. As was the custom on these occasions we all took a solemn oath to meet again at Kiev, in the school buildings, in ten years' time for the purpose of comparing notes about what should have happened to us in the meantime. . . . This meeting never came off. . . . Those leaving school in 1918 were drawn violently into opposing channels and saw little chance of seeing one another again except, perhaps, as enemies. Many joined up with the White Armies, whose recruiting agents were very active in Kiev.

I went to live with my Bolshevik friend Levine, who had startlingly informative pamphlets dealing with every subject under the sun. The complete reorganisation of mankind on a basis of equality and free labour, seemed to him to offer no difficulties whatever. "Assume," he would say, "for the sake of argument, that there are three moujiks. One has a horse, another a plough, the third a sack of seed. Divided, they cannot even sow their own strips of land; united, they can manage perfectly well." That, at least, is what the poet Demian Biedny said in simple and striking verses published in a small volume illustrated with cuts.

'Biedny' means 'poor man', and the 'poor' Demian, who was at one time the official poet of Bolshevism, has become eclipsed in rather a disquieting fashion since I began writing these memoirs.

"If we want to get rid of poverty, injustice and war, the first thing we've got to do is to abolish private property. . . ."

"Well," thought I to myself, "in that case I'm a Communist too!"—so triumphant did I feel at having followed the argument. All we had now to do was to fight those who wanted to prevent the workers from reorganising the world. . . . One night we were arrested by the Germans —doubtless as a result of somebody having informed against us. After a few days I managed to escape by jumping a wall during the daily distribution of coffee. I heard a rifle-shot behind me. I ran across a number of small gardens, jumped several fences, and found myself finally in the street. . . . My friend Levine was released the following week, but he had been badly frightened on my account and on his own.

Fearing lest I might be rearrested, I took to flight, but of the ensuing events I remember little. My idea had been to reach the district of Tcherkassy where one of my uncles was living. Unfortunately, while still in the goods wagon in which the journey had to be made, I fell ill and was soon delirious. Fever kept me in a state of complete exhaustion, now shivering with cold, now stifled with heat. A kindly peasant managed to get from me in the course of my mental wanderings, the name of the place to which I was going, and, when we arrived, saw me taken out of the train, put into a wagon and driven to Uncle Peter's. I regained consciousness in what seemed to me then Paradise itself. In fact, it was the hospital of a small, completely unknown, market-town. The room was white, an open window gave on to a garden full of flowers, and an elderly nurse, dressed all in white, was near at hand with a bowl of *kissel* (soup). I gathered that I had just had a bad attack of that Spanish 'flu of which so many were later to die.

The clean, methodical Germans proceeded to institute a pitiless system of requisitions. In the village of Vissky, where Uncle Peter lived, there was a tragic incident. Some German soldiers on a plundering expedition had been defeated and disarmed. The Town Major issued orders for the arrest of ten peasants and imposed on the village a very heavy fine. On the night following, a German sentry was killed. The Germans found some rifles with sawn-off barrels hidden on one or two farms, straightway arrested a further ten young fellows, and then shot all their prisoners. A handful of men put up a fight in the woods that lay around the property of the Countess Brannitzkaya which had been expropriated by the peasants. They set fire to a blockhouse and then fired point-blank at the soldiers who were trying to escape from the burning building. Twenty Germans, including a non-commissioned officer were killed in this affray. I did not know at the time what had happened, but it was becoming dangerous for me to stay any longer in the village. I was already regarded with suspicion, and knew what it meant to get on the wrong side of the police. Two weeks before, my uncle had sent me to the refinery for some sugar. This refinery stood close to the railway station a few kilometres from Vissky. I found myself by chance in the little waiting-room of the station when the bell announcing the departure of a train began to clang. A woman, dragging after her a little girl, and bent double under the weight of a sack, made a dash for the platform. The door was guarded by a policeman who pushed the woman brutally back. The little girl fell down and began to cry. The poor peasant begged the man to let her pass; the train was already moving slowly. I picked the child up, saying to the mother as I did so: "No good speaking to him, you can see he's just a brute." I had scarcely uttered the words, when I stumbled backwards under a blow on the head from the flat of the man's sword. With a volley of oaths the police officer went out on to the platform. I can see myself now scrabbling on the dirty floor for my spilled sugar, the bluish-white pieces of which were stained with red, for I was bleeding profusely. The old countryman who was waiting for me with his cart asked me what had happened. I said nothing. So furious was I that I was quite unconscious of any pain. I forced myself to remain calm despite the grossness of the outrage to which I had been submitted. I had to remain silent unless I wanted to find myself in gaol. This incident, coming after what had occurred in Kiev, classed me among the "dangerous elements." Now that we were living more or less in a state of siege, it looked as though I were going to pay dear for what I had done. One night Uncle Peter came for me. "You'd better clear out," he said. "I think they're going to shoot anyone they're at all doubtful about. . . ."

Kiev was decidedly safer, although street fighting was constantly breaking out. I managed to find some lessons to give in the house of a doctor with monarchist sympathies. The old man's hopes were dashed to the ground when the newspapers published the telegrams from Germany announcing the military collapse of the various fronts, the Armistice, the Kaiser's flight, and the revolution. By December 1918 the Hetman of the Ukrainian State held no more than a few villages in the immediate neighbourhood of Kiev. It was just about then that I got my second view of him. I happened to be passing the great Church of St. Vladimir. A few coffins—about fifteen of them—draped in the colours of the old Russian Empire, had been laid in front of the cathedral. Some military units commanded by officers in Russian uniforms paid the final honours. The Hetman dismounted from his horse and advanced beneath an archway formed also of tricolour flags; he was wearing the same uniform as his officers. "So the Ukrainian pantomime is over," thought I, amazed by this sudden change in the appearance of things. A few idlers watched the ceremony from afar, but there was not a single cheer. The troops were tired and few in number—no longer an imposing sight. "Let the dead bury their dead," I said to myself. An attempt to bolster up the bellicose spirit of the few remaining groups of students who still sported monarchist badges was made by the publication of *communiqués* to the effect that the French were disembarking at Odessa! . . . Not a single German soldier remained in the city.

Word went round that the Petlurians were coming. The National Republic was once more in control of Kiev. I expected to see squadrons of cavalry in National uniforms, but was surprised instead by the spectacle of thousands of sledges and carts accompanying what appeared to be a whole nation in process of migration, crowds of peasants mingling with nondescript soldiers without any marks of identification but with their belts stuck full of grenades, their bodies criss-crossed with cartridge belts, and armed with the most miscellaneous collection of weapons it was possible to imagine, ranging from guns of every description to primitive pikes, with, here and there, a machine-gun mounted on an old cab. They were accompanied by their wives and in some cases by their children, and sang as they marched to the music of accordions. Some were in high spirits, others looked serious. Among the flags they carried, the yellow and blue of the Ukraine were far outnumbered by the red of the Soviets. It was the beginning of a peasant revolution.

Levine said to me: "Piatakov has set up a Bolshevik government on the left bank of the Dnieper. We've got to get through the lines: our place is with them. Are you coming?"

"You bet I am."

We started next day with a crowd of refugees in a train that seemed to trundle along without any fixed destination, jammed in a coach without partitions, the occupants of which ran the risk alternately of being suffocated if they lit a fire, or of freezing to death if they didn't. Suddenly the train came to a halt. Self-appointed officials ran down the various coaches crying: "Citizens! the driver won't go on unless we give him two bottles of brandy—stump up what you can!" . . . We boys, with our school certificates, were supposed to be going home to our parents who were waiting for us on the farther side of a battle-front which never remained in the same place for long together.

We covered the next thirty kilometres on a locomotive to the sides of which those cleverer and luckier than ourselves were hanging in clusters—having paid something to the driver for the privilege. It was moving in the direction of the front, that being the point at which everyone wanted to arrive. Levine and I could find room only on the buffers, just over the lamps. We suffered tortures from the wind, the cold, and the heat of the engine. Our legs were frozen, our chests lacerated by the freezing wind, and our backs burned owing to the close proximity of the boiler. All around us lay mile upon mile of white desolation. It was a terrible journey. . . . A sentry post made us change direction. . . . We fell in with a group of Jewish petty traders who were trying to get back across the lines to their native villages. We travelled along the deserted roads in sledges. Towards the end of the fifth day we drew near the zone occupied by the Reds. Faces grew dark with anxiety. Somebody cried "Sentries!" and a number of very young men, mounted on horses and fully armed, appeared from nowhere.

"Give up any weapons you've got!" shouted one of them, who seemed to be in command. "Those attempting to hide them will be shot!"

We had none. Our unknown interlocutors gave a hurried look at our baggage, but no one was searched.

"Who are you?" we asked.

"Local Bolsheviks."

The Red Army was still far off. On the 31st December we reached Gomel, in Soviet territory. A young man in a leather jerkin scrutinised our papers in a small guardroom. They were not much use: we had to explain that. . . . Suddenly he looked up and uttered a joyful exclamation. It was my old school friend Model.

I was to meet him, fifteen years later, by chance in a Moscow street, a look of despair on his face, a furtive caution marking his every word. "What are you doing?" I asked him. "Just keeping alive," he answered. "I was turned out of the Party on the ground that I belonged to the Opposition, then reinstated. Come and see me, and I'll tell you about it. . . ." He gave me his address. When, a few days later, I knocked at his door, it was opened by a terrified old woman who said he was no longer there, that she could tell me nothing, that she didn't know him. . . . I realised that he must be in prison. That was in 1935.

CHAPTER VI

CIVIL WAR

I FOUND a letter from my mother awaiting me. She wrote that my father had died during the summer from Spanish 'flu. . . . I went to see his second wife, whom I found depressed and much aged. Her house was sadly dilapidated. As of old she joked with me, but there was something in her laughter that tore at my heart. The front-door steps were in ruins, the ceilings sagged, and the kitchen, once spotless, was littered with neglected crockery. . . . I could find no words with which to express my feelings, and had to go before I could control my emotion.

Then began for me a chaotic year of journeys, fighting, and difficulties of every kind. Levine instructed me to carry a message to Kiev. I repassed the lines hidden in a train full of German prisoners whose close proximity saved me from dying of cold. Antonov-Ovséenko, in command of a small army composed of Donetz miners and workmen from Kharkov, was in control of Kiev, while bands of peasants, led by atamans, held the neighbouring countryside. The Petlurians were engineering a rising in the suburbs of Podolsk; the Poles were in Korostene. The atamans, Stroug, Zelenyi, Sokolovsky and Mazourenko, were busy massacring Jews in the villages; Makhno and Grigoriev had collected bands of anarchists; General Denikin was starting an offensive in the south. . . . My line of reasoning was simple. I wasn't going on with my studies while the power of the Soviets was still in danger. I must take my share in saving it, join the Party, and become a fighter. Levine agreed to recommend my name to the Central Party Committee in Kiev. At this time it was by no means easy to become a member. There were two preliminary stages, each of six months, during which one ranked first as a "sympathiser" and then as a "candidate". Only after passing through both successfully could one enjoy full membership. Levine took me to see Mikhail Tcherny, at that time secretary of the Kiev Bolshevik organisation, in a room filled with clouds of smoke. A man dressed in an embroidered blouse, with a high forehead and curly hair, looked at me for a moment, with a smile on his lips.

"Since you have twice crossed the lines in the service of the Party, I am going to admit you without the usual preliminaries. But remember this: the Communist is before all things a fighter; even more important, he is an agitator, and it must be his constant endeavour to set an example. . . ."

So there I was, a Bolshevik at last! I was going to count for something in the Revolution. I had been found worthy of trust. I felt that I was on the threshold of a new life which promised to be full of excitement and of danger. . . .

When General Denikin's White Army occupied the city, Mikhail Tcherny remained behind to take charge of an underground organisation. He was captured, gave a fine example of courage, and was hanged.

I was attached to the special Communist battalion of a regiment in process of formation. I was given to understand that we should shortly be sent into the country to suppress a peasant rising. How was I to reconcile this necessity with the words of the slogan placarded up over the door of the War Commissariat, "Peace to the villagers, war to the landlords"? But how could we let the peasant counter-revolution continue its work of massacring the Jews, starving the cities, and floundering on nowhere, to an accompaniment of slaughter dictated by fifty different leaders of lawless bands?

The battalion to which I was attached was quartered in a School for Young Ladies of Noble Parentage. We occupied the ground floor, the young ladies the floor above. While we drilled in a part of the garden set aside for us, they took their morning walks, two by two, a short distance off, dressed in tippets and white collars.

It was our duty as Communists to form the centre of resistance in a regiment of young men who had been mobilised much against their wills. I received my baptism of fire in the course of a battle lasting several days against the followers of the two atamans, Stroug and Zelenyi. The Bolshevik Skrypnik was in charge of the operations which had as their object the surrounding of the district of Tripolié where, two months earlier, Zelenyi had surprised a regiment of young Communists, killing them almost to a man. The Reds were sleeping in a number of whitewashed cottages, when the enemy's carts burst into the town (the atamans conducted their campaigns in carts and carriages which gave them the mobility of cavalry). . . . At our approach Zelenyi evacuated his headquarters. I found a number of papers there and some proclamations bearing his signature. He called upon the peasants to liberate "The Ukraine, our Dear Mother" by dint of cutting the throats of all Jews and Communists. . . . When I heard the bullets begin to whistle about my head my chief fear was of being afraid. The battle began against an invisible enemy, and was at first more difficult than dangerous. We were told to dig shelters for ourselves with our hands and bayonets. At night we were bitterly cold; in the day time we were hot, hungry and thirsty, for we remained in the front line for four days and nights without, naturally, any proper organisation of rations. So famished were we, that in spite of scattered rifle-fire we were tempted to make a raid on a field of peas lying between the two positions hail of bullets drove us off. No meal, however good, has since seemed to me nearly so attractive as those inaccessible vegetables! . . . We managed, however, to get back to our lines under cover of darkness. Two light guns, mounted in a near-by field, barked angrily. The moral effect of artillery on infantry in trenches is magical, although its only actual effect as a rule is to provoke retaliation. We thought that Zelenyi had no guns, but we were wrong. He, like ourselves, had two field-pieces which immediately joined in the game. . . .

At dawn on the fifth day the signal was given for a general assault, and we rushed forward without meeting with any serious resistance. The enemy fled. Suddenly, however, I found my companions scattering along the side of the road. There was a shout of "Look out! cavalry!'—and a cloud of dust could be seen moving rapidly in our direction. By this time we were all in the ditch. I had the presence of mind to take a good look at what was happening, and thought I could make out a number of black sheep! Still, whether we were up against a frightened flock or enemy horse, we should be better off staying where we were than taking to our heels. I hadn't even got a stripe, but so furious was I at the sight of soldiers running terror-struck before a purely hypothetical danger, that I found myself shouting, waving my arms, and assuming an authority that was not mine. I went so far as to fire over the heads of the fugitives. "Get back into line, you pack of cowards!" I yelled, "or we'll shoot the whole lot of you!" There were only three or four of us Communists, but we made as much noise as we could. "It's nothing but a lot of sheep, you bloody fools!" I took command forthwith, got the men into some sort of order, and, when the officer in charge came up he found us holding the position. . . . Nevertheless, Zelenyi had succeeded in breaking through. Without realising it at the time, I had been within an ace of winning a big success. An official inquiry was held, as a result of which it was found that our troops had made a very bad showing. Certain detachments, attacked unexpectedly, had permitted the enemy to make a breach in the ring of steel which we had drawn round him. As a result of faulty liaison my own company had found itself in rear of the fighting-line. "Shoot the Communists as an example to the others," said Skrypnik. My commanding officer pointed out that, so far as we were concerned, the Communists had already given an admirable example, having succeeded in checking a rout. "All right, then," Skrypnik decided, "promote them Commissars." And so it came about that I was appointed Political Commissar of the battalion.

We occupied Tripolié. There was nobody left in the houses of the little town but a few women, children and old men. The younger men had all gone to earth. Not a cow, not a chicken, not a scrap of bread was to be found anywhere. Everything had been hidden with amazing skill. We realised that we had got to reassure the peasants, who had been told that the Reds commandeered all they could find without payment. Our High Command ordered a few looters to be shot. One poor devil suffered in this way for having helped himself to a young pig. . . . The sight of us in the flesh, however, considerably diminished the fear bred by our reputation. I could speak the Ukrainian language, and, as a result of my efforts, bread and eggs gradually emerged from secret stores. One night a few chickens made their appearance; confidence was restored. But this happy state of affairs was ruined when the authorities proceeded to issue a mobilisation order, instructing all the men of the place to report within three days under threat of severe punishment. A crowd of angry women surrounded the headquarters office shouting that they wouldn't have their men called up. "We shall never see them again! If you want to shoot them you'd better find them!" They were quite ready to tear us to pieces. The Battalion Commander promised to do what he could to get the mobilisation order postponed.

While attending a conference of Commissars which was held on a flight of garden steps somewhere in Kiev, I heard for the first time, and saw at close range, Rakovsky. He was a man still in his early youth with an energetic face and a gift of persuasive eloquence. As head of the Soviet government of the Ukraine he was the heart and brain of a whole countryside torn by internal quarrels, utterly chaotic, and constantly on the point of collapse. His reputation as an old Socialist who had escaped from Jassy prison, and as a survivor of the Rumanian revolution in which Rochal had lost his life, endeared him to us. He was followed on the platform by Boubnov. What they had to say was in general optimistic, for the mutterings of revolution could be heard in every country of Europe. The immediate local situation, however, was precarious in the extreme. Petlura and Denikin were marching on Kiev at the head of numerically superior forces, and the atamans were in control of the villages. We should have to evacuate the capital. My own regiment was detailed to guard the outskirts of the city which was on the point of being surrounded. Pavlov, a member of the Revolutionary Council of the army detailed for the defence of Kiev, and commanding the district, was a level-headed soldier whose air of quiet confidence never diminished however confused the situation might be. He was one of those men who seem destined always to save what can be saved out of the very jaws of defeat. In 1927 he became one of the advisers of Chiang-Kai-Shek and was drowned in the course of a difficult retreat in South China. I can see him now standing on the roadside, watching the march past of regiments reduced to a few hundred men each. "We must reorganise," was all he said. From his staff I heard what was happening. Iakir, surrounded in the neighbourhood of Odessa, had broken through with his army, and was fighting his way northwards towards us. . . .

In the midst of these historical events, subordinated to them, and reacting to their every modification, my personal existence became so varied, so full of the unexpected, so much complicated by incidents of every kind, that, were I to narrate it in full this chapter would swell to the size of a volume. . . . I confine myself, therefore, to noting certain aspects only which may be said to have contributed to my education and to have deeply influenced my future. I was sent into the countryside on a mission which I brought to an unexpectedly successful termination. My regiment was called upon to provide three detachments whose duty it was to requisition food from the peasants. Each detachment consisted of one Communist and four soldiers. The first, in charge of a Georgian Commissar, never returned. Doubtless it was massacred. The second managed to find its way back but without weapons, having been kicked and beaten out of the villages. My knowledge of Ukrainian served me in good stead. I brought back with me thirty cartloads of foodstuffs. We had entered a large village one moonlit night. The slender spires of two churches were silhouetted against the starry sky. We knocked at a door. A very old man opened to us.

"Who's in charge here?" I asked.

"In charge? Nobody, thank God," he answered slyly. "We don't bother about that sort of thing."

Next day I called a meeting of the village. Naturally nobody came except a few women, old men and children. I pointed out that we needed food and that it would be bad policy on the part of the peasants to drive a regiment, consisting of eight hundred Red soldiers camped less than forty kilometres away, to desperation. I added that, provided everyone contributed, we would be contented with very little. Receipts would be given for everything brought in. There would be no arbitrary requisitioning. . . . Next morning I awaited in a state of considerable anxiety the results of my exhortation. They exceeded my wildest hopes. One after another the farmers' wives turned up, bringing bread, flour and potatoes. "The village elders would like a word with you," one of them said to me. "They're coming to my house for a glass of tea this evening. . . ." This might, of course, be a trap, but I decided to go, alone and with no weapons showing. . . . Our interview lasted far into the night. The only credit I can claim is that, instead of resorting to threats, I argued with my interlocutors.

As a Commissar I was paid at the rate of 3,000 roubles a month, as though I had been an officer. The first time that I received this sum my conscience as an enthusiastic newcomer to the Party stirred uneasily. Could I accept such a privilege when the ordinary soldier was getting no more than 150 roubles? I had no difficulty in persuading the other Communists in the regiment that it was our duty publicly to refuse to take advantage of this favouritism. The Political Committee of the brigade, however, was annoyed by our attitude and reprimanded us for questioning the policy adopted by the Party in respect of specialists. "Wait a few years," we were told. "When we've trained a corps of Communist officers and put the Socialist régime on a firm footing, it'll be time to start bothering our heads about equality." . . . Alas!

This little misunderstanding—it was soon dissipated, for we were easily persuaded and the mere whisper of the words "Party discipline" overcame all our resistance—did not prevent my appointment as Commissar of the new regiment formed from the remnants of three others which had been disbanded during the evacuation of Kiev. Iakir's forces had joined up with us—but in what a condition! Two men in every three were without boots and were dressed in nothing but rags. Though I had been through a great deal less, I was not, despite my high office, much better to look at. My boots were almost worn out, my knees were coming through my trousers, and my tunic had lost any colour it may have had. . . . Thus equipped I left to attend the course for Red officers at Minsk. I was conscious of my ignorance, and had had sufficient experience of war to respond to the appeal issued by Trotsky, who was planning the formation of a certain number of cadres of Communist officers, hoping thereby to remedy the state of dual command then in vogue, which consisted in dividing authority between Commissars and old Regular officers. This dualism had resulted from the necessity of having the Regular officers watched by Communists, and, on the other hand, of giving them, in the field, the advantage of feeling that they had behind them the care, the advice, the support of men invested with the authority of the Party. Later, when the Red Army should have developed its own officer formations, the Commissars would disappear, and the unity of command so necessary for efficiency in war, would be re-established.[1] As one who had served as a Commissar I realised very soon the negative quality that attached to a dualism of command, and for that reason I had sent in my name to Headquarters as a candidate for the course. A few months of study would greatly enhance my value as a soldier. The political bureau of the army granted my request.

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[1] This is what happened at the end of about ten years, and the new state of affairs lasted until 1937 when Stalin, after having destroyed the High Command, found himself faced with the necessity of attaching to the Communist officers formed by the Revolution—and no longer, as in 1918, appointed by an autocratic Government—Political Commissars entrusted, this time,with the duty of acting as secret police. It is well known that this measure resulted in the almost total destruction of the middle and upper ranks of the army, and in the demoralisation of the troops.

And now, here was another journey before me by barge and canal. My life so far had not been lacking in dangerous expeditions, but my night on that barge is fixed in my memory as the nearest thing to Hell I have ever known. The hold, which was the only shelter available against the chill of the night air, was filled to an incredible degree with parasites—lice, bugs and fleas. I awoke at the end of an hour, to find myself being devoured by insects, which covered me from head to foot. I rushed up on deck like a madman, only to discover that my clothes were infested with the little beasts. Never have I seen so many parasites on a human body or in human clothing. It was inexplicable, and I felt literally sick. . . .

I felt certain that I should see my mother at Gomel. While at the front I had received a miserable letter from her. She could not understand me. Instead of being proud of a Communist son who was fighting with the army and had already been made a Commissar, she scolded me. "Stop playing the fool," she wrote, "and come back to me. Your two brothers have been killed; don't you think that is enough? You will die for no good reason at all and I shall be left without support. You ought to think of me a little. . . ." I replied that my two brothers had fallen in the service of Imperialism, waging an unjust war in the ranks of an army of oppressors; while, if I should shed my blood, it would be in the Red Army of workers, fighting for a just cause and the liberation of all the oppressed of the world. If death was to be my fate my life would have been given for the future. I asked her to try to understand me, and to join wholeheartedly with me in the cause of the Revolution. . . . I was only eighteen.

[Topical Press

RAKOVSKY

GENERAL SCHMIDT

CHAPTER VII

STUDENT LIFE, EPIDEMICS, BATTLES

DESTINY had brought me once again to Gomel, a place thronged for me with memories. The red-painted coaches of the worn-out old train, so typical of those Civil War years, dwindled behind me into the distance. Looking back now, I can see myself whistling jauntily as I left the station. I had no haversack, no luggage of any kind. I wore a leather coat, a revolver at my belt, and possessed not even so much as a change of linen. On my cap was the five-pointed red star; in my pockets a few Kerensky bank-notes representing barely half their printed value. That was the sum total of my belongings. But I had all the future before me, unless, of course, some stray bullet finished me off first. Should that happen I should have died gloriously, though without realising it, for the Revolution (like so many of my friends about whom it's better not to think). An important scrap of paper contained my authorisation to enrol myself in the School of Officer Learners, Dismounted Section, of the Red Army of Workmen and Peasants. The course which I was to attend had been transferred from Minsk to Gomel owing to the necessities of the military situation. . . .

I turned out of my direct route in order to pay my mother a visit. As I walked through the narrow, shabby streets, I thought what a blessed thing it was not to be at the mercy of events, but to have at the end of all one's stretch of years one goal and one goal only—but that the greatest of all, the conquest of the world for the proletariat. Young men would be needed like myself, above ground and beneath it, before such a victory could be attained, and meanwhile it was the duty of all of us to get ready. . . .

Here was the house. The windows had an odd look, as though a changed influence were at work in it. Nobody answered to my knocking. Some neighbours informed me that my people had all left, that my mother had taken on a nursing job with some hospital unit; no, they couldn't say which, but it had gone off by rail a few days before.

So here I was, more than ever at a loose end in this city. Luckily, there was no time for sentimentalising.

The Military College was lodged in spacious buildings which formerly had belonged to a Seminary. From the very first moment I was delighted, almost amazed, by the cleanliness and order everywhere apparent. Real beds with real sheets! Just think what that must have meant to me who, for more than a year, had forgotten what it was like to have a change of linen! The walls of the lecture-rooms were hung with diagrams of gun mechanism; there were racks of carefully waxed and polished small-arms; and the sentries on duty at the entrance, unlike the soldiers I had been accustomed to, did not carry their rifles slung casually from their shoulders by a piece of string.

At once there was a noticeable change in my appearance, which I realised with satisfaction. I had a bath, my head was shaved—as a protection against lice, I was issued with a new military greatcoat and given a number of text-books on such subjects as topography, tactics and Army Regulations.

I have nothing but pleasant memories of this infantry school. Despite the chaotic situation, despite the fact that it was situated in a small town all but in a state of siege, and in any case, threatened from three sides and continuing its independent existence only because of lack of unity in the enemy ranks, despite a general lack of everything, it managed to carry on the good work in an atmosphere of calm confidence. It must have needed an enormous amount of tact to run the place successfully. The teaching staff was composed of officers of the old régime, who probably, in their hearts, were opposed to Bolshevik ideals, and who quite certainly were of an entirely different mentality from the revolutionaries they had to deal with. They had been induced to take on the job by an appeal to their sense of duty and professional pride. Trotsky had just recently begun, with the support of Lenin, to put into action his pet scheme of building up a Red Army with the help of professional soldiers. The scheme resulted in a few cases of treachery and costly failure, but on the whole they were few. What was really remarkable was the amount of courage, devotion and loyalty shown in the service of this enterprise. The director, an old Guards officer called R——, was very proud of our smart appearance though he adopted a rather sceptical attitude to the task demanded of him, which was no less than to turn a lot of young workmen into infantry officers after a six weeks' period of training! With his turned-up moustache, military boots, bright eye and Russian blouse, he made no pretence about concealing the irony with which he regarded those in power. But at his work he was excellent, and seemed happy enough provided he could control his 'prentice officers more efficiently than the People's Commissars were controlling the Republic. Two Communists had been told off to assist him—both valuable men, one by reason of his political shrewdness, the other because of the extent of his knowledge. Of these two, Gayster, who was in charge of political training, later filled many important positions in the district, and ended up as Under-Secretary to the Central Office of Statistics. (His last days were spent, for no very obvious reason, in prison. I remember seeing his name, in '37 or '38, cited in some criminal connexion on the occasion of one of the Moscow trials.) His companion was the Commissar Michael Ivanovitch Bloukhov, one of the first examples I came across of a man of steadfast revolutionary faith.

Bloukhov was tall and owed his success as a soldier to the fact that he had been born with a snub nose. This led to his being enrolled in the Pavlovtsi regiment of the Imperial Guard formed in memory of the Emperor Paul I. It consisted entirely of men with snub noses, because the face of the murdered Tsar whose name they bore had been so graced. The Pavlovtsi regiment happening to be in Petrograd during the 1917 crises, Bloukhov, snub nose and all, heard Lenin speaking from a balcony and became a convert.

I arrived at the Military College early in the autumn of 1919, at a time of grave danger for the young Soviet Republic. A small White Army, under the command of General Ioudénitch, was marching on Petrograd. The "National Army" of General Denikin was advancing on Toula, after having occupied almost the whole of the Ukraine. General Miller with his English troops held Archangel and the coast of the White Sea. Admiral Koltchak was threatening the districts of the Ural Mountains and the Volga. Seen on the map the country round Gomel formed a sort of enclave isolated between two battle-fronts—Denikin's White troops on the west, General Haller's Poles to the east. The one comfort was that the Poles were not at all anxious for the success of a general who was fighting in the name of "Russia one and indivisible", and must therefore be opposed to the national existence of Poland. For quite different reasons Denikin held back from giving Haller adequate support. Between these two hostile forces there were we, a handful of 400 learners attempting to master the rudiments of the art of war in the expectation of having to fight both of them. . . .

There was nothing academic about our training. So practical was it, indeed, that a good third of our number never finished the course, but were cut off halfway and buried with a thin show of military honours—when there was time for such things. Thanks to the excellence of our organisation and to the fact that in a time of semi-starvation we were reasonably well fed, we formed a sort of shock detachment which was detailed for any difficult job and pushed into every tight corner. Such was the fate, all over Russia, of the *Koursanty* or cadets.

While I was busy with my military studies I was also playing the part of an agitator. When things looked blackest, the Central Committee decided to launch a recruiting drive on behalf of the Party. The idea was a good one; anyone who joined us now, at a time when it was far more likely that a Communist would be hanged or shot than that he would find a Government job, had some claim to be regarded as sincere. The first occasion in which I spoke in public was at a meeting held in a small cinema. I was terrified when I was told to go in front of the curtain and face an auditorium that, by this time, was thick with tobacco smoke. I tried to work up the necessary self-confidence by putting my hands in my pockets. . . .

The Red Army was everywhere in retreat. I compared it to a spring which has to be compressed before it can be released. The applause that greeted my well-meaning efforts was sufficiently perfunctory, but my nervousness vanished as though by magic. Only once have I ever suffered from it since—when, as Consul of the U.S.S.R., I had to deliver my first speech in Persia. On that occasion I was overwhelmed by the thought of my responsibilities. But what would happen to consular duties if the young men in the Service did not take them seriously?

We went everywhere, into factories, offices, schools, saying in substance: "Join a Party which offers you neither privileges nor advantages. If we win, we will build a new world; if we lose we will sell our lives dearly. Who is not with us is against us!" From that small town alone our desperate cause drew 1,500 new adherents. The Military College joined to a man. Our "cell" increased from 15 to 370 members. Among them were a number of former officers of the Imperial Army. Through the length and breadth of Russia this recruiting campaign resulted in the formation of a Party consisting of hundreds of thousands of fighters pledged to achieve miracles. It is the survivors of this period whom Stalin's creatures are exterminating as I write. . . .

In the course of six months our studies were four times interrupted by practical interludes at the front. . . . Out of 400 learners, 150 were killed (of the thirty men of my own year, 15 were to perish within the next twelve months in front of Warsaw). The first duty assigned to us was, for me, particularly disagreeable. A unit of mobile troops had mutinied and refused to go into the line. We were sent for, surrounded the mutineers and arrested the Commanding Officer and the Commissar of the disaffected formation. Both men, together with several others, were immediately court-martialled and shot. We returned from this expedition without much glory, but having learned a lesson essential to those who would master the soldier's calling.

On another occasion the city was threatened suddenly by a Polish offensive. General Haller was approaching from the direction of Rechitza, a place lying some fifty kilometres distant from Gomel. We were called upon to bar his way, but this time were kept in reserve. My chief memory of this incident is of a gruelling walk in the dawn along a bitterly cold, empty road fringed here and there with birch-trees. I was so worn out that I could almost have slept as I moved. I was quite alone, and trudged on mechanically, trying to find the front-line trenches which lay somewhere hidden in the snow. . . . Our participation, in December, with Iakir's troops in an attack on Kiev, was a more serious matter. At Krestchatiki we had our first experience of street fighting. The enemy fired at us from windows and bombarded us with anything that came to hand from stones, scrap-iron and bits of furniture to boiling water. The Reds were forced to retire. A day or two later an armoured car appeared suddenly in the village we were occupying. Rifle-fire broke out from every direction. We retreated towards the river with the intention of crossing it on the ice, which, however, was too thin and gave way. It was only with the greatest difficulty that I managed to scramble ashore. My legs were stiff, and, though I had been in the water only a few minutes, my greatcoat was frozen so hard that I could break pieces off it. One of my feet had been twice grazed by bullets. I now began to feel the weakening effect of too long dependence on a diet deprived of fatty substances. Though my wounds were slight enough in themselves, I had to go to hospital, and thus paid a visit to a corner of Hell which Dante seems not to have explored. Never shall I forget the operating theatres where, in an oppressive stench of rotting flesh, rows of groaning men had been laid out naked on tables, presenting to the view every variation imaginable of torn limbs, gangrenous wounds, and physical suffering. The hospital was crowded, badly equipped, and in want of the most elementary essentials such as anaesthetics and disinfectants. The sight of so much black and green putrescence made me forget my own injuries.

Hunger, cold and typhus were in complete control of the little town. The water in the barrack-rooms froze in the thin buckets. I slept fully clothed, wearing my boots and my sheepskin cap, happy enough if I could occasionally cover myself with the mattress of some companion absent on guard duty. We lived on black bread—and *what* black bread! Full of lumps and, despite the extreme cold, always mouldy—frozen potatoes and herring soup. And even so we were counted lucky!

Every day the few remaining horses could be seen dragging with difficulty through the streets to the cemetery those who had died the evening before. The bodies were laid out in the cold sunlight, dressed in their shirts or covered with sheets which, more often than not, were nothing but rags—for there was a shortage of linen and of clothes of any sort—enclosed in long deal boxes which were the nearest possible approach to coffins. There were too many corpses and too few men available to bury them, everyone of military age having been mobilised. A thaw might come any moment, and that would mean a recrudescence of epidemics. The whole Military School was detailed for cemetery fatigue. We had to dig great ditches a yard deep in the frozen earth and throw into them all those rotting human remains, many of them covered with wounds, yet some retaining in death a curious appearance of purity.

After all this grave-digging, musketry was almost a game. Our instructors had devised an excellent system: if a man was a good shot he was allowed to go back to barracks earlier than the others, and so get his soup fairly hot. Thus encouraged I became as good a shot as I had been a grave-digger.

I was elected to the Gomel Soviet and appointed as a member of the committee charged with the duty of scrutinising the qualifications of those who applied for admission. A number of Menshevik Social Democrat workmen had been elected, as well as several deputies from the Jewish Socialist organisation. We decided not to recognise the Mensheviks, considering them in the light of enemies of the Revolution. Esther Froumkina, who later joined the Bolsheviks and became one of the militant leaders of the U.S.S.R. before ending her days in prison along with the right-wing elements of the Party, protested vehemently against this attack on working-class democracy. In those days I wasn't very clear in my mind about what was happening. I am inclined to regret now that one learns only too late the full significance of what one does in the heat of the political moment. . . . The Menshevik deputies withdrew in a dignified manner, little suspecting that their party had been outlawed for at least ten years.

As a result of a new offensive Haller was able to occupy Rechitza and cross the river. Gomel was just about to fall into the enemy's hands when Trotsky arrived. Already the convoys of refugees, lines of miserable carts piled high with boxes, papers, and odds and ends of possessions, were dragging their weary way along the roads leading to Novozybkov, already the presidents of the local executive and the local Cheka were on the move in their cars, and there was nothing left at the station but the last armoured train, a sort of forlorn hope, commanded by a fanatical ex-sailor, when everything suddenly changed and we realised that the tide had begun to turn. Trotsky brought with him teams of disciplined organisers, agitators and technicians, all animated by a dauntless spirit of determination. The 58th Division, reduced to a few hundred bayonets, had just retreated before the oncoming Poles. Our School left at dawn to take up a position at a bridge-head outside Rechitza. The battle that ensued was full of movement. We delivered a bayonet charge against a number of marksmen hidden behind a hedge. One of the old Regular officers, a man who knew no fear, led us with the utmost coolness, revolver in hand. He was the first through the hedge. We were forced back, however. We were fighting this time against veterans of the Great War who had gained their experience on the fields of France and Germany. It was our worst defeat. Out of 240 learners more than 100 were left on the ground, and we had to retreat. But General Haller's troops never got through. They had sworn to reach Moscow!—so we were told. Those of us who survived the day said: "They shan't even see Gomel!" The brother of Bloukhov, our Political Commissar, a boy of twenty, was killed. I brought the sad news to Michael Ivanovitch. His grey-looking face set slowly in a hard expression. He could find nothing but the most commonplace remark to make to me—"Good, then Vania has fallen for the Revolution"—and went on to discuss the operations.

Trotsky paid a visit to the front lines. He made us a speech. We felt the breath of that energy which he took with him everywhere he went in moments of crisis. The situation, catastrophic but twenty-four hours earlier, had improved as though by a miracle, though, in fact, the only miraculous thing about it was the perfectly natural effect of organisation and determination. For a long time I used to carry about with me a copy of the speech made by Trotsky to the School, typed out in the Red Army train. Those few pages of greyish paper were very precious to me. Did the O.G.P.U., I wonder, find them among my things in Moscow, and file them as further evidence of my complicity in the "Trotskyist treason" of 1919? Why not? Every standard of good sense went down in chaos with the truths of history. . . . Among the men dressed in black leather who accompanied the inspirer of the Red Army on the occasion of his visit to our trenches, was a young fellow of whom I took no particular notice. Léon Sédov, at that time about fifteen years old, was with his father. I have already mentioned his visit, when, like me, he was exiled and a Soviet outlaw. Together, a few days before his sudden death, we lived over again these happy memories.

CHAPTER VIII

WE DID NOT TAKE WARSAW . . .

FRESH troops were now pouring up to the front. . . . I finished my studies. A day came when, my examinations passed, I left the College in a new rig-out, my breast resplendent with the raw-hide straps of my equipment, a short officer's sword knocking against my knee. . . . All these symbols of authority, the soldierly air they gave me and the feeling they induced in me that now at last I was to take my share in great events, were responsible for my consciousness, at that time, of an emotion at once childish and virile. Carrying a small green suit-case I got into a railway coach reserved for soldiers—one of those comfortable coaches of the 4th or 5th class, with a stove in the middle for heating, the occupants of which lived in common and slept on straw. I was *en route* for Mohilev's command, where I was to be at the disposal of Headquarters, XVIth Army, at that time commanded by Kork (one of the eight generals shot on 11th June 1937). . . .

In the matter of revolutions chance often shows itself to be possessed of a curious gift of invention which would do credit to a novelist. It so happened that our train stopped at a crowded little station. It was a sunny morning in the month of May. I got out to make some purchases from the peasant girls who were running up and down the coaches offering for sale—at ridiculously high prices—milk, potato cakes cooked in oil made from sunflower seeds, and little rolls with lovely golden crust, baked in some village which had escaped the horrors of famine. . . . I ran into a nurse dressed in white and wearing a starched cap. We stopped dead, both of us overcome by emotion and amazement. It was my mother, hastening back to her hospital train which was due to start in a few minutes. We had time only for a few words and a hurried embrace, but the meeting was all the sweeter for being so utterly unexpected.

At Army Headquarters I was received with a certain amount of suspicion. What conceivable use could we young Red officers be after an intensive six months training at the hands of a lot of political agitators? The old officers who had been recruited as specialists by Trotsky were moved by professional uneasiness to put this question to themselves. I was subjected to an examination from which I managed to emerge satisfactorily, thanks largely no doubt, to a certain cynical indifference on their part. Another was imposed on me by the Political Commissar. This was no less difficult, but he had to admit that though my knowledge might be imperfect, there could be no doubt of the excellence of my intentions. I was attached by the authorities to a reserve regiment of infantry commanded by a former non-commissioned officer of the name of Illiouchenko. He had to take on two of us Red officers. He was a large, reddish-faced man, who set great store by his own importance. In order to stress his rank he always went from his billet to both Army and Regimental Headquarters in a carriage, though the distance was no more than a few hundred yards. He took a spiteful pleasure in appointing me to the command of the last platoon of the last company which was the 9th of the 3rd Battalion. Since the regiment was "dressed" in order of size, I found myself in charge of the smallest men on parade, though I happened to be one of the tallest officers present. Still, if I had had nothing to worry me but the purely decorative aspect of my command I should have been happy enough.

The War Council at this time was planning a large-scale offensive against Warsaw, which was to be undertaken because Lenin wished it though Trotsky had raised several objections. We knew nothing of what was happening in the higher grades of the Party, but the XVIth Army was destined, apparently, to a feverish and chaotic existence. Every day it had to absorb new drafts, that is to say a mob of men drawn from the woods, the fields, and the villages, who had got to be transformed without delay into soldiers worthy of the immense army whose duty it was to liberate Poland from Capitalism and Germany from the effects of the Treaty of Versailles. A large number of these men were deserters who had been lying hidden for months, perhaps even for years, in the forests and villages of Russia. Several Extraordinary Commissions were appointed to round them up systematically, making examples where necessary, granting amnesties where advisable, organising drives in the heavily wooded countryside. Some of these deserters had remained concealed since the beginning of the war. Our regiment took 400 of them. Their arrival was the occasion of my first promotion. The commander put me in charge of a company which would have delighted the heart of any stage producer looking for a chance of introducing a little low comedy into a tragic play. The new recruits were an incredible mixture of men of all ages—though mostly young—wretched scarecrows, filthily dirty, and dressed in every variety of peasant costume, uniform only in their raggedness. They loafed along, hung about with sacks and packages, scratching themselves, swearing softly, suspicious, hostile, intimidated, and probably determined to do as little in the soldiering line as possible. . . . I approached them in my brand new uniform, and never had the little *ancien régime* sword knocking against my knee seemed so laughably ineffective. For a moment I despaired of ever being able to do anything with such material, then I told them to fall in. Once drawn up on parade men cease to be merely a mob. The degree of discipline involved is small, but it is enough. One feels immediately that one is in control. I made them a short speech.

"Comrades, from this moment you are soldiers of the Red Army. You must be keen and you must obey! I am your commander. I want non-commissioned officers. I rely on you to supply them. Those who have ever had a stripe, say so!"

No one moved. There was a general air of mistrust.

"Former non-commissioned officers, two paces forward, march!"

Not a movement. I felt my fledgeling authority seriously compromised. I walked down the line, carefully looking at the faces, questioning the few men who seemed to be rather better educated than their fellows.

"Here you, you've been a sergeant: I can see that. Step forward!"

The man stepped forward. I put him through one or two evolutions, noting his responses. He shammed awkwardness, pretending not to understand the words of command. Two hundred pairs of eyes watched the scene, missing nothing. One undersized peasant dressed in rags won the day for me by admitting that he had been a sergeant. He knew all about the army, he said.

"Consider yourself promoted," I said, "and now, jump to it!"

Reassured after his first moment of fear, he soon became one of my most valued collaborators, keen and resourceful. He helped me to find others. I began to notice an atmosphere of confidence. All that remained for the moment was to get my men clean and to exchange their rags for uniforms. I arranged baths for them on the following Wednesday afternoon. I drew a supply of underclothing, soap, disinfectants, and even boots and leggings. Tunics and trousers would not be available until the Thursday. But I couldn't let them come out of the baths and put on their awful lice-ridden clothes. Well, war is war. When they had finished washing, their rags were nowhere to be found, and they had to be content with shirts and under-pants. Thus clad, they fell in in fours behind me, and we marched through the town singing and trying to look as soldierly as possible—two hundred poor devils in nothing but their pants headed by a Red officer very much on his dignity, but secretly rather worried. Mohilev had been a staff officer in the Imperial Army and had a tradition of smartness which he did everything he could to enforce. Our march caused general stupefaction, and the worst of it was that my men, as is usual on such occasions, sang pretty well together. I had found several rather good voices among them, but they knew only the songs popular in the ranks before the *débâcle*, and obviously had a weakness for the least refined! . . . and as the least refined had at least the merit of evoking the soldierly spirit of the pre-Revolution days, it would have been foolish to check them. So there were my two hundred devils in shirts and pants yelling words at the top of their voices which would have brought a blush to the face of the most hardened sinner! A crowd of approving guttersnipes swarmed round us.

It was my duty to imbue my ex-deserters with the elements of civil, political, and moral instruction. I borrowed my arguments from Krylenko's *Political Manual*, a little book bound in red which the Party Bureau of Propaganda issued to the young officers of the Revolution. It was a sort of encyclopaedia of Bolshevism, written with spirit, knowledge, and passion. The name of Krylenko

[*Wide World*

TROTSKY

was dear to us. At the end of the war he was a sub-lieutenant, when suddenly he found himself appointed by Lenin and Trotsky Commander-in-Chief of the Russian armies faced with the duty of breaking down the resistance of the former General Staff to the new régime. Later, he became Procurator of the Republic, and finally People's Commissar for Justice, a post which he occupied until 1937. Holder of several Soviet decorations for having conducted a number of the most publicised of the political trials, he disappeared in 1937 when he was imprisoned. His successor referred to him in the columns of the *Pravda* as a "wretched scoundrel". Every summer Krylenko went climbing, and it is matter of common knowledge that he carried Stalin's bust to the top of the highest peak of the Pamir.

But in being led on to write of his unhappy end, I have digressed from the story of my début as a propagandist. I did my best to deliver a number of lectures. It so happened that one of my colleagues, a shrewd old professional soldier who was usually drunk when he was not on parade, came in while I was conducting one of my classes. "Making rather heavy weather of it, aren't you?" he said somewhat tactlessly. "Not at all," I replied. "You hit on an awkward moment, that's all." . . . There were a good many awkward moments. My men had a way of listening to me in silence, lost in a sort of gloomy boredom, and resigning themselves to my eloquence as they might have resigned themselves to a shower of rain.

Having made friends with a Communist officer, a former sailor of Tartar origin who had been a member of the Party since 1918, I agreed to share a billet with him. He was a phlegmatic fellow, good-tempered and slow of speech, who gave me the feeling that he could be relied upon in any circumstances. On taking up my quarters with him I was not a little surprised to discover that he was living with two young women—little more than girls—and that all three were in the habit of sleeping in the same bed. The sounds of laughter audible at night made it clear that they were on the most excellent terms. "I picked them up on a retreat," said the former sailor, as though the explanation were in some sort an excuse. "They had lost everything. I gave them food, and they sort of clung to me. What was I to do? I couldn't very well kick them into the street." The situation became complicated when his wife arrived, a militant member of the Party, who moved about from front to front. He was very fond of her, and had great respect for her character; for, said he, she had "made a man of him", teaching him to realise the true inwardness of the Revolution. She was small and serious-minded, with close-cropped hair, and went about in a man's cap and tunic, with a document case under her arm—a typical example of the female agitator so common at that time. . . . Nothing dramatic happened; the whole business was settled in the most peaceable fashion. The two waifs took to sleeping together on the floor in one corner of the room, surrendering to the official wife any claim they might have to the conjugal bed. Although it was so many years ago, I can still, in imagination, see the little group gathered together of an evening, hear the two girls, one slim and fine-featured, the other plump and fresh-complexioned, whispering together. . . . At the time I had viewed the situation with mixed emotions. Bred, as I was, on Dickens rather than on Maupassant, I regarded love as something secret and dreamlike. I had not foreseen what would happen to it in times of civil war, with all the terrible simplification of human needs that such periods bring.

Commissar Bloukhov had rejoined me. A conversation which we had at this time was to be the determining factor, little as I knew it then, of my destiny. We had just read the news that Raskolnikov, in command of a Red fleet, had appeared before Enzeli, a small Persian port on the Caspian, where he had delivered an ultimatum to the authorities, seized the two old gun-boats which comprised the only White naval forces on the spot, and landed a detachment of men who, according to the *Pravda* "were received with popular acclamation". Commissar Bloukhov, the snub-nosed ex-member of the Pavlovtsi regiment, and I looked at one another, moved by the same tremendous idea. We were about to liberate Persia! to start the Socialist Revolution in Asia! At our approach all the oppressed would rise. . . . I may not be able to reproduce the freshness of our optimism, but I can give a pretty true version of the ideas that animated us. How, we wondered, were the great Imperialist powers to be fought, how could the peoples of the East be made to rouse themselves? Our conclusions amounted to this, that we must learn Oriental languages, disguise ourselves as merchants, penetrate into the heart of Afghanistan and there make ready the national revolution. . . . It was at that moment that for the first time I thought of taking up the study of an Oriental language.

I want to insert, at this point of my narrative, the portrait of a man and the description of a career which are, both of them, characteristic of the times of which I am writing. I had noticed a young soldier of about seventeen or eighteen, who seemed smarter than the others, and had made him my batman. He was called Prosorovsky. He was a bright lad with a leaning towards the arts. I've forgotten now why it was he left me, but I know that some years later, in one of the smartest streets of Moscow, I met a young man with dark rings round his eyes, dressed with elegance, who shook me very effusively by the hand. It was Prosorovsky. He was studying the technique of the cinema and was on the way to establishing his reputation as an artist. He had already won a certain amount of recognition with the two films, *Bella*, and *Princess Mary*, in which he had realised for the screen, in a slightly Byronic vein, some of the inventions of Lermontov. A few years later I met him again in the Caucasus where he was living with his wife in one of the O.G.P.U. sanatoria. So far as I could make out he had made a double career for himself, being at once an artist and a secret agent in police employment. In November 1935, at a small watering-place in the Caucasus, we ran across each other for the last time. He was still accompanied by, and on terms of familiarity with, a number of Secret Service officials. Within a few months of this meeting I heard that he had committed suicide. Spymania had already become rampant all over the country. Prosorovsky's name was Polish, nothing was known of him before his war record, he was himself ignorant of his origins. It seems to me not unlikely that he was given a revolver with the words: "Do it yourself; it makes less trouble all round, and your relatives won't suffer so much."

A day came when the officers commanding the various units read to their men on parade the orders issued by Toukhatchevsky as Commander-in-Chief and by Kork, the XVIth Army Commander. Toukhatchevsky concluded by detailing for our information the objectives of the campaign. "Forward, to Vilna, Minsk and Warsaw!" and Kork took up the refrain with a "Forward, XVIth Army," adding, "—for the liberation of the Workers of Poland and in the Name of the Communist International, forward!" Vilna and Minsk were taken without difficulty; we were but fifteen kilometres from Warsaw. I shall make no effort to give a detailed history of this campaign which I saw, much as Stendhal's soldier saw the Battle of

Waterloo, in terms of forced marches, first towards Warsaw and then away from it. We advanced without meeting any very serious resistance, and so rapidly that our baggage train was sometimes as much as a hundred or a hundred and fifty kilometres to our rear. Our army was stretched out along the roads like a string. That our communications were in danger of being cut was obvious to all. The opening offensive had been crowned by such complete success and pushed forward with such enthusiasm, that the reserves had become involved without orders, breaking all discipline and merely confusing the operations. The enemy avoided an engagement, the population remained hostile. Supplies became increasingly difficult; at times the guns could not get any ammunition. The back of the Red Army was broken beneath the walls of Warsaw by the French artillery. We began to pour homewards along the way we had come in fear of finding our communications cut. Toukhatchevsky's army, the Political Commissars of which were Unschlicht, Rakovsky and Smilga (all three imprisoned during the years 1933–37) had, at the last moment, not been supported by the cavalry of Boudienny and Voroshilov. This mounted formation, under the direction of, among others, a little-known member of the Central Committee named Stalin, had manœuvred without reference to the main body in an attempt to win a contributory victory at Lvov. . . . The result had been two defeats.

What is there to say of the retreat? Time has blurred its details in the memory of those who took part in it. There was complete chaos. Transport, fighting troops, staffs, and all the various arms became involved in inextricable confusion. The artillery, by this time quite useless, was merely in the way. . . . There were times when the retreat became a rout. Direction was lost. We marched on ignorant, especially when darkness fell, of where we were going, through forests and marshes, lost and exhausted, hung up at every cross-roads and waiting for instructions. Everywhere was a babble of shouted orders. For most of the time, so far as I remember, I was half-asleep and dropping with fatigue. Suddenly, in some clearing of a nightmare wood, our torches would reveal a confusion of cars and wagons and transport that had lost its way. . . . The country was hostile and devastated.

At Bobruisk, Headquarters of this Red Army of Poland which had never properly been born, I happened to see three young Polish Communist officers bending over a map. Their names were Loganovsky, B—— and Schuster. I was to meet them all later at the Staff College where they were taking a course at the same time as myself. Loganovsky entered the Diplomatic Service, was secretary of the Embassy at Warsaw, where he got involved in certain compromising activities, and later still at Vienna. I saw him again in 1924 on my way through Austria with a diplomatic bag. Clever, and gifted with great strength of character, he had been made privy to the most secret and dangerous aspects of Soviet policy abroad. For some years he was a member of the O.G.P.U. and then became assistant to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, in other words, deputy to Rosengoltz. . . . The day after Toukhatchevsky's execution he was arrested. A number of fools or ruffians were found who swore to the fact that for twenty years he had been a Polish spy—he, who for ages had snapped his fingers in the faces of the Polish police. Is he still alive? Of B—— I had better say nothing, since it is possible that he has so far escaped the slings of fortune. Schuster, too, went into diplomacy, held several posts in Sweden and Italy, and was in England in 1937 just at the time when the destruction of our diplomatic machinery began. He was recalled, probably impeached with Iouréniev, the ambassador, and has now almost certainly vanished. . . .

During the march on Warsaw I had occasion to meet a strapping, bearded Commissar, notable for his coolness in moments of crisis. This was Radin, head of the Political Department. In 1936 I saw his name in a list of persons designated as "enemies of the people" and denounced by the Press at the same time as Zinoviev.

CHAPTER IX

THE WAR COLLEGE OF THE RED STAR

AT the end of the Polish campaign, the Military-Revolutionary Council of the XVIth Army detailed me to undergo a course at the Headquarters Academy, the newly constituted War College for senior officers. I took the train for Moscow. Already, instead of the single small rectangle denoting a lieutenant's rank which I had sported when I joined this particular army in the spring, I could now display on the sleeve of my tunic the four golden insignia of a "Regimental Commander".

In the autumn of 1920 Moscow looked like a city that had lost at least fifty per cent of its population. The place was half deserted, poor and melancholy. Scarcely a single motor-car was to be seen. The occasional cabs which still managed to pick up a living were drawn by miserable old horses, mere bags of bones, their stomachs suffering from morbid dilation. Life at the fronts was feverish and active; in Moscow it dozed away the wretched dismal days, round the Kremlin where the brain of the Revolution worked on without pause with a calm courage which at times seemed an expression of fanatic ardour, at others of despair.

The District Commandant gave me a pass entitling me to stay at one of the hotels reserved for military use. It was situated near Nikitskie Vorota (the Nikita Gates), on one of the circular boulevards. The tiny square, adorned to-day by the monument to Timiriazev, was, at the time of which I am writing, extremely picturesque. The whole central part was filled with crumbled masonry —the remains of houses destroyed by artillery fire during the October rising. A huge building near by, situated right on the boulevard, had been burned, and presented now to the view nothing but a tall skeleton framework. At the far end the house fronts still bore the scars of street fighting. The hotel in which I was billeted, a building of two stories only, had never been a first-class establishment. But the chief thing, after all, was to have a roof to shelter me and a table at which to work for my entrance examination. My room seemed designed more for the purposes of temporary love-affairs than to serve as the study of a young man hoping to become a pupil at the revolutionary War College. That, however, didn't prevent my buckling to with enthusiasm. I had not been able to get any books of the kind I wanted from the regular booksellers, and was reduced to following my courses in geometry, algebra and history, with the help of multigraphed lecture notes, and felt only too glad to have been able to get them. . . . The District Commandant had supplied me with spiritual as well as physical sustenance. The physical part of his bounty consisted of bread—black, of course, but almost abundant. My food cards assured me of a supply of thin soup and a ration of potted meat amounting to about one-fifth of what my appetite demanded. The spiritual took the form of theatre tickets. Chance determined that one of my room neighbours should turn out to be an old schoolmate from Gomel, who now offered his services as guide to my modest frivolities. He was an odd creature. As a boy I remembered him as red-haired and slightly lame, always scrounging something and for ever driving petty bargains. When I met him again in the capital of the Revolution he had become a sort of comic fashion-plate, never to be seen without a starched collar and carefully pressed trousers. His name was Choura Richevitch, and he occupied the position of secretary to the Arts Commission. I suppose that he still drove his petty bargains but on a scale more in keeping with his changed circumstances. . . . However that may have been, he had a store of saccharine, thanks to which we were able to have sweetened tea—a rare luxury. So far as I was concerned, he pushed condescension to the point of initiating me into the mysteries of musical comedy.

Our harassed divisions were returning from Poland, pursuing General Denikin's National Army, or invading the Ukraine. In the Kremlin Lenin was spending laborious days drawing up manifestos against the famine. In his war-train, Trotsky was rushing from one battle front to another. Each night the Cheka was dispatching to the next world its regular instalment of counter-revolutionaries—or poor wretches arrested as such. But still the theatres played the *Cloches de Corneville*, and *The Geisha*, in which pirouetting midshipmen in glittering caps, unknown to any navy of the world, went three by three into tea-gardens where they were welcomed by little geisha girls bowing and fluttering fans, and everyone spoke or sang the most completely idiotic sentiments which had nothing on earth to do with anything. And the theatre was filled with couples young and old, soldiers fresh from yesterday's massacre, and ready in a few hours to set off for to-morrow's. I clapped like the rest, finding the geishas charming, and not giving a thought to the disembowelled horses that had marked the retreat along the roads of Poland, nor to ambulances floundering in the quagmires. . . . Nevertheless, after a while, I found that these musical comedies were getting on my nerves.

The Red Square was still unadorned, still badly paved, and still dominated, from behind the Kremlin walls, by a number of church towers which have since been swept away. Entrance to it was by the Iberian Gate, now also vanished, and by a small church which has gone the way of its bigger brothers. . . . But the real centre of

Moscow, of a city that to us Communists was completely strange and unknown, was the Soukharevka Market. It was always filled with people, though its trade was wholly illicit. Men in uniform grey strolled about; while crowds of women, some of whom had come in from the country, with little bags of farm produce with which to speculate at famine rates, bartered a pat of butter against silk handkerchiefs, and others, disguised in their poorest clothes, offered for sale the mixed relics of former prosperity—all that remained of wealth that had been destroyed by the Revolution. They would be perfectly ready to display two scraps of sugar on a saucer, and I confess that my attention was more often drawn by such pathetic traffic than by the enforced sale of old coral necklaces or of complete leather-bound sets of the works of Verbitskaya—that once famous female novelist who had drawn tears from a whole generation of young ladies.

The War College was situated in the Rue Vosdvijenka where it occupied a building formerly belonging to the Hunt Club. The great staircase was flanked by two stuffed bears—proffering trays. The walls of the various rooms were adorned with antlers and other trophies of the chase. . . . It was in this curiously unsuitable setting that old General Snéssarev, the former explorer of Central Asia, received us with frigid politeness. The College could not boast a single instructor of the good revolutionary tinge. The whole staff consisted of former officers of the Imperial Army, famous, decorated, and sometimes known outside the narrow circles of their profession—men such as the two Novitsky brothers; Neznamow, author of several works on strategy; Verhovsky, who had been War Minister in the Provisional Government of 1917; Martynov who had fought against the Japanese in 1905; Velitchko, who had been responsible for the fortification of Port Arthur and was known as Kuropaktin's evil genius; Gatovsky, the expert in cavalry tactics, and Svetchine, the theorist and historian of the art of war.

The pupils of the College were in dramatic contrast to the members of the teaching staff. All had fought in the Civil War, all knew well what war meant, and more than one had gained distinction as tacticians and strategists although completely ignorant of the theoretical side of their job. Some of them were nearly illiterate, but that did not alter the fact that they had done wonders as leaders of Red cavalry, having defeated generals no less expert in the theories of Clausewitz and Napoleon than the men from whom they had now to learn. These far from ordinary pupils were ready at a moment's notice to leave their school benches to go to the aid of the Republic on the ice round Kronstadt or elsewhere. The professors, too, had to interrupt their educational duties, perhaps three times a year, when they were given short terms in the prisons of the Cheka as hostages or suspects. They were regularly put behind bars each time the internal situation took a turn for the worse. Such expeditions came as no surprise to them; it was even said that they kept a bag packed in readiness.

While at the College I made the acquaintance of several leaders of the Red Army, who had come there as students. There was Gay, fresh from a German concentration camp where he had been interned after the battle of Warsaw, and Chadenko, Zotov and Matousenko, who had served with Boudienny whose fame far eclipsed that of Voroshilov his adviser. (Boudienny commanded the Red cavalry, while Voroshilov was only one of the Political Council attached to his army.) Others among my colleagues were Boubenetz, Tchapaief's friend, and the ex-sailor Dybenko, a genial giant renowned for the part he had played in the events of 1917–18, who had just contracted a much talked-of marriage with Alexandra

Kollontay, one of the best women agitators of the day. With him were his companions Ouritsky and Fedko. The latter has recently made an unexpected success, having been appointed, in 1938, as Under-Commissar for Defence after the mysterious disappearance of several former holders of that important post. . . . Ouritsky, brother of the president of the Petrograd Cheka who was assassinated in 1918, was to make a distinguished career at Army Headquarters before vanishing from public life in 1937. Stetsky, appointed as Director of Agitation and Party Propaganda, has, it seems, quite recently been arrested. Ventzov was Military Attaché in France at the time of the conclusion of the Franco–Soviet Pact (he has disappeared since). . . . Alksnis, at the time I knew him, was Political Commissar of a division, and was later, after the removal of Unschlicht, to become head of the Soviet Flying Services. He too has vanished.

Three remarkable men sat for their entrance examination at the same time as myself: Savitsky, a member of the War Council of the Ukraine; Kovtioukh, the hero of the Kuban campaign so powerfully described by Serafimovitch in his *Torrent of Steel*; and Dimitri Schmidt, whom Stalin's spite condemned to a tragic end in 1937. His name appeared among the so-called enemies of the people sacrificed to the new tyranny, but, so far as I know, he was executed without trial. I met him for the first time on the steps of the College in September 1920, as one of a large group. His energetic face was clean shaven, but he wore a fringe of beard beneath his chin in the former naval fashion which, in our own day, has been made popular by Radek. He had thin lips and hot, piercing eyes. He wore a fur cap set at the rakish angle that one associates with the cavalrymen of the south. His uniform consisted of a blue blouse adorned with two medals of the Red Flag—a very rare distinction in those days even among the seasoned warriors of the Army—a Caucasian belt hung with metal ornaments, and a great curved sabre in a patterned scabbard which had doubtless been presented to him in commemoration of some hard-fought battle. He limped (as the result of a wound not yet completely healed) and supported himself on a stick. He was the typical Red soldier, an incarnation of energy, stretched taut like a strung bow. He moved slowly, and obviously felt out of his element in the capital.

General Snéssarev received us with meticulous politeness, and, I should imagine, with considerable curiosity.

At the examination Schmidt was quite hopeless, and rather touching. Three old generals put the candidates through their paces. The senior member of the board was Martynov, famous for his book on the Manchurian campaign of 1905, and known to be addicted to philosophy. The generals carried through their task without enthusiasm, putting to these commanders of Brigades and Armies of the Civil War exactly the same questions they would have put in old days to the pupils who had followed the prescribed course in the various military schools. For instance, we were told to write an essay on "the importance of the war with Sweden and of the victories of Peter the Great for the newly established Russian Empire". Luckily, our examiners were indulgent! At the *viva voce* interview Schmidt was the first to be called. Dragging his wounded leg, his great sabre clanking at his side, he advanced to the table.

"What are the dates of Peter II?" he was asked.

"I have no idea," replied the candidate dryly, speaking with a slight Ukrainian accent, which gave to his words a quite unintentional note of insolence.

"Name the wars of Catharine II."

Schmidt gave a sidelong smile as though he knew he was being laughed at.

"I don't know them."

The three generals glanced at one another; Martynov pressed his point.

"Tell us when the Empress Catherine reigned and the date of her death."

"I was not born at the time, and the point has no interest for me."

He tapped nervously with his stick on the floor. Martynov gave vent to an outburst.

"This is intolerable, gentlemen! I refuse to put any further questions to the candidate."

Finally the Political Commissar intervened, and this best of all Ukrainian cavalry leaders was admitted to the College on condition that he promised to pass the examination later when he should have had time to prepare the necessary work—which, of course, meant never. But he did put in two years hard and rewarding study. We became great friends. He was incredibly brave, very simple and very determined, given to mockery and to bouts of almost childish sentimentality. His character had been formed in the hard school of war, and he bore its mark to his dying day. We used to spend long evenings together in the little room where he lived in an hotel on the Rue Tverskaya. His wife, Valentine, young, charming and, like him, steeped in the events of the time, served us with tea and the unforgettable objects which, in those days, did duty for cakes. Dimitri Schmidt would recount the epic careers of the men who had fought with him, of sailors who had become cavalry soldiers to fight the Germans, the Whites and the Ukrainian Nationalists, of warrior bands whose members never exactly knew what they were. Schmidt had thrown himself into Kamenetz-Podolsk when it was surrounded by marauding guerrillas, determined to defend the town at all costs. The walls had been placarded with his manifestos couched in mingled phrases of threat and encouragement. They were signed "Comrade Schmidt". While at Kamenetz-Podolsk he had received Tibor Szamuely, the People's Commissar for War in the Soviet Government of Hungary, who had just arrived by air. Later, the Revolutionary War Council appointed Schmidt to the command of a body of shock troops destined to force the Polish and Rumanian frontiers at the orders of Lenin and Trotsky. The idea of fighting his way into Hungary and Poland in no wise dismayed him. I am certain that he always regretted that the order was never given. It was too late. Red Budapest fell too quickly. The incompetence of Bela-Kun was in part responsible.

Once, in the Ukraine, Schmidt, accompanied only by a handful of mounted men, rode into the camp of the atamans who commanded the various independent bands at that time in arms against him. Negotiations turned out to be extremely difficult. As a last resort, by the light of a bivouac fire, Schmidt shot down his chief opponents with his revolver. His division surrounded the camp, and the brigands surrendered. Some years after he had been a student at the College, and while he was stationed at Minsk, one of his senior officers insulted his wife. Schmidt sent him tumbling downstairs with a bullet in his guts. The man was not killed, and the affair was hushed up. During the period 1925–7 Schmidt joined the Opposition. Victor Serge recounted to me an incident which may have played a considerable part in determining his fate ten years later. On the eve of the Party Congress of 1927—at which the exclusion of the Trotskyist opposition was announced—Schmidt, who had just arrived in Moscow and was wearing as usual the uniform of his Division—the great black riding-cloak, the belt with its pendent metal ornaments, the curved sabre and the fur cap cocked over one ear—coming out of the

Kremlin with Radek, ran into Stalin, who was going the opposite way. Political feeling was pretty violent just then. Stalin, in full career as a conspirator, had not yet brought the Party to heel. Schmidt went up to him, and, half joking, half serious, began to blackguard him as only old fellow campaigners know how—that is, in terms which have to be heard to be believed. As he finished speaking, he made a gesture as though to draw his sabre, and told the Secretary-General of the Central Committee that one day he'd cut his ears off. . . . Stalin listened to the diatribe saying nothing, but his face was dead white and his lips drawn into a tight line. At the time he chose to treat his interlocutor as beneath his notice, but there can be little doubt that ten years later he remembered the violent threat of which he had been the victim. Dimitri Schmidt has disappeared, accused of terrorism. No confession was forced from him. He was killed without that.

When I think of Schmidt I think also of a great monster of a fellow with curly hair, sharp eyes, and the voice of a fanatic. This was Savitsky, a member of the War Council of the Ukrainian Republic. We lived together for three years in the same room of the Hotel Livadia, Rue Tverskaya, helped one another to pull through the streets little sledges piled with flour and potatoes for the future generals of the Red Army, hunted together for old bricks among the rubbish which covered the spot where now rises the magnificent Central Telegraph Office, shared the same chair when we wanted to warm ourselves before the stove, bent together over the same tactical problems and the same English "unseens". . . . He had a wife and child whom he adored. Everything he did, he did with his whole heart. Once, when he had been travelling in the Ukraine he brought me back a Ukrainian translation of Bukharin's and Preobrajensky's

A.B.C. of Communism. As an old Ukrainian member of the Socialist Left, he was filled with pride at finding this book in the language of his native country. Ten years later I met Savitsky again in Moscow where he was acting as chief of the Army Administrative Services. Together we paid a visit to the Military Headquarters Holiday Home at Arkhangelskoe. Still thin, still eager, he had changed scarcely at all. He showed me over the comfortable palace, richly furnished with objects of art, bathed in silence and the reflected light of stretching snowfields, where our generals could come occasionally to mark time for a few days and enjoy a little peace and quiet. . . . How many of the men I met there last year have since come to a tragic end? What has happened to Savitsky?

The College was divided into three main Faculties, with an additional Faculty of Oriental Languages. It catered in all for about 600 pupils. We worked in teams of five under the direction of professional officers. Our enthusiasm may be guessed from the fact that, apart from my military work, I arranged to take evening classes held under the auspices of the Oriental Faculty at which I tackled five languages simultaneously—English, Persian (obligatory), French, Hindustani and Arabic, with all of which I made considerable progress. The dream of acting as a revolutionary agent in the East, born in my mind during a conversation with Bloukhov, had never left me.

Zuckerman, Director of the Department of Foreign Affairs, was at that time acting as Political Commissar to the Oriental Faculty. (He was shot on 16th December 1937 at the same time as Karakhan and Enoukidzé. . . .) I had also as fellow pupils two young Orientalists, assistants to Zuckerman at the Foreign Office, Pastoukhov, later Soviet ambassador in Persia, and Slavoutsky who, at the present moment, is ambassador in Tokyo where he succeeded the unfortunate Iouréniev. There was also Khassis, who, when Consul at Canton, was killed by the Chinese after the revolution of 1927–8.

Let no one imagine that we enjoyed anything like the comfort of students at Oxford or the Sorbonne. The Republic looked after our interests, it is true, but what she gave was at once much and little—board, lodging and uniform. This latter was not without a certain magnificence. Many of us wore striking cavalry breeches of dark red, decorated with yellow braid. Great strapping, sunburnt fellows could be seen going from lecture-room to lecture-room in all the bravery of green and blue tunics adorned with medals, magnificent breeches and high boots—carrying under their arms text-books and loaves of black bread. Together with the former generals of the Imperial Army, who were here to teach them, they would wait patiently in the corridors for the daily distribution of rations. By 2 o'clock, as a rule, we had eaten the day's bread issue, drunk our soup (it was not of a kind that one remembers with pleasure!); and from then on there was nothing we could do to stave off the pangs of hunger until next day but drink tea in the evening. The hotel was not heated. In our rooms, next to the useless radiators which evoked memories of a vanished civilisation, we constructed for ourselves a kind of stove made of bricks. These bricks, as I have already said, we collected from the ruined houses that littered the end of the most frequented thoroughfare of Moscow. Each man made his stove in the style, shape and size that most suited his taste. But then the question arose, what could we burn in these contraptions whose chimneys usually stuck through the window? When the cold was intense we used anything we could find, even valuable antique furniture. This happened not seldom. My friend

Pomérantsev invented a method of procuring fuel which deserves commemoration. The commandant of the hotel kept a close eye—as was only right—on the general maintenance of the place. One day he got the surprise of his life when he happened to be present during a search of Pomérantsev's room for some purpose which I have forgotten. It became obvious at once that the furniture, the floor, and in places, the walls, had a merely superficial solidity. It was all like a stage scene. Drawers and shelves had vanished from the insides of the wardrobes, blocks had been removed from the floor in those places where the furniture could be used to disguise the theft, whole sections of panelling had been taken from behind pictures. . . . And this room was not the only one where such things had happened. . . . The "setting" had become two-dimensional instead of the normal three where objects in space are concerned.

In 1920 the College took part in the violent Party discussions on the subject of Trades Unions. The Party members were not deeply concerned, but the affair had far-reaching results. What form should the Unions take in the Soviet State? It was the view of the working-class opposition that they should control production. Lenin and Zinoviev held that they should be entirely subordinated to the Party and become a vast organisation with, as its object, the education of the workers and the defence of the interests of the wage-earners. Trotsky wanted to see them more and more incorporated in the State. These were the main proposals. Boubnov's Democratic Centralisation group had another. Bukharin put forward a compromise. Roudzoutak and nine other well-known militants signed what was called the Manifesto of the Ten, to which Lenin gave his support. Alexandra Kollontay voiced in a fiery speech the ideals of the working-class opposition. She was still a beautiful woman, and appeared dressed in black with a high collar up to her chin, combining sophisticated simplicity with real elegance. She was pale, scarcely showed her age, and was in full possession of those great gifts that marked her as a propagandist of the first rank. Even in those days she was denouncing the prevalence of bureaucrats in the State Party, and demanding a return to the policy of working-class democracy. (We knew that she was the wife of one of our number, Dybenko, the former sailor from Kronstadt, and that made her our familiar friend.)

When the moment for voting came, out of the 300 Communist pupils of the College, 13 sided with Trotsky, 32 with Lenin, and 250 with Kollontay. Views were expressed with complete freedom, as between comrades.

CHAPTER X

MISSION TO BOKHARA

EARLY in 1921 an internal crisis, far more serious than any threat from outside, began to imperil the existence of the régime. The chief cause was shortage of food, which was due to the exhaustion of reserves as a result of the Civil War, and to the policy pursued in regard to the peasants, which can be summed up in the single word—requisitions. The personnel of the College was suddenly mobilised. We were given rifles. We slept in the lecture-rooms, transformed for the purpose into dormitories. Karl Radek came, on behalf of the Central Committee, to explain the situation to us. The atmosphere was tense. Radek, thin and with a face of intelligent ugliness, spoke for three hours to an absorbed audience. His accent, no doubt, was frightful, but at the end of the first fifteen minutes we had entirely forgotten it, so completely did his earnestness, and the frank seriousness of his explanation, make up for any faults of pronunciation. He made no effort, apparently, to conceal from us the extreme danger of the situation. Kalinin, President of the Republic, had been greeted in the factories with cat-calls, boos, insults, and cries of "Give us bread—we've had enough talk!" Bits of metal had been thrown at him. "The Party", said Radek, "is the self-conscious advance-guard of the working classes. We are now at a point where the labouring masses, at the end of their endurance, refuse any longer to follow an advance-guard which continues to lead them to battle and sacrifice. . . . Ought we to yield to the clamours of working-men who have reached the limit of their patience and their physical endurance, but who are less informed than we are about what is for their true advantage? Their state of mind is, at times, frankly reactionary. The Party has decided that we shall *not* yield, that we must impose our will to victory on our exhausted and dispirited following. Grave events are impending. You must be ready. . . ." This meant that we might have to use our weapons not against counter-revolution but against the masses who had defied the Party.

This is precisely what happened at Kronstadt in March 1921. The Tenth Congress of the Party was in session, while the garrison and civil population of the chief fortress of the Republic on which depended the safety of Petrograd was in open insurrection. A mortal danger was threatening the Republic just when food was shortest and the will to resistance at its lowest. The defeated forces of the counter-revolution hoped to take advantage of the revolt to begin the Civil War once again. The Congress decided in these circumstances to call a halt to its internal differences. The working-class opposition was solemnly condemned. Dissident groups and movements were forbidden, and hundreds of delegates left to do battle on the Kronstadt front. One whole Faculty of the College was sent with Dybenko, Fedko, and Ouritsky—the three inseparables—with Stetsky, Borchtchevsky, Tourchan, and others. The Supreme War Council appointed Toukhatchevsky to conduct the operations. Trotsky hurried to the scene. A rumour was current that the Petrograd Artillery School had declared for the Kronstadt rebels, and that a number of persons had been shot. About the 20th March, my friends returned from Kronstadt victorious but embittered. Tourchan had been in charge of the first attack of the Brigade composed of learners from the Military Colleges, across the ice. It had started from the north shore of the Gulf of Finland, only to be broken by the fire of the rebel forts. Whole masses of ice had collapsed, and hundreds of the officer cadets had been plunged into the freezing water. The second attack was hurriedly pushed forward, for fear of a thaw which would have permitted the insurgents to make use of their fleet and given them the initiative. This time the assaulting waves had taken off from the south shore, led by Dybenko and Fedko. The men made their way across the lumpy ice wearing white smocks. The orders were to reach Kronstadt no matter how fierce the fire. The guns of the fortress killed great numbers of the advancing Reds and halted the attacking troops for a moment when they were within a short distance of the island. Two men, maddened with fear, had taken shelter in a barge frozen into the ice, and had refused to return to their places in the line. Borchtchevsky shot them both under the eyes of his troops and gave the order to advance. . . . I record these details as they were told me by my friends.

A letter arrived informing me that my mother, as a result of two attacks of typhus, one exanthematic, the other of the recurrent species, and a bout of typhoid fever, was lying miserably ill in a field hospital. I asked for and obtained leave of absence in order to visit her. I had parted, a few months previously, in a small wayside station, from a woman of forty, upright and in the full vigour of life; I found her a mere shadow of what she had been. She was thin, wrinkled, bent, and looked twenty years more than her age. Her hair had been cropped, and her mind seemed to have become affected. I took her back to live with me. Each day we shared my 600 grammes of rye bread, a little buckwheat and a few herrings, and this modest ration little by little gave her back her strength. When spring came she was able to leave for the Ukraine where she was born, to take up once again her hospital work.

I was now on the point of finishing my military studies, and, a short while afterwards, an unhappy love-affair left me with a longing to get away. One of my friends, whom I will call Tarikov, had a wife—a pretty little Tartar woman—who took an interest in my mother's and my unhappy household. She was charming. . . . In short, one fine day I asked her to leave Tarikov. I was passionately in love, and so, apparently, was Khadidzé (for that was her name). Although we lived in neighbouring rooms she would write me long letters the style of which at first surprised, then enchanted, me, such magic lay in her use of words. At a matter of fact they contained but a few lyrical metaphors borrowed from the poetry of the East. The ardour of her epistolary style, however, did not prevent Khadidzé from remaining attached to her husband, a Tartar like herself, who probably understood her a great deal better than I did. He got wind of our meetings and asked me for an explanation. The moral standards of the Party were strict in such matters, but they were based upon an attitude of wide tolerance. We should have to reach a rational solution. I have an impression that all the militants of my generation were particularly scrupulous in affairs of the heart, and careful always to respect the woman's sense of dignity. We agreed to let Khadidzé decide between us. This calm and brotherly discussion of so personal a matter would, I think, interest a novelist, but it is not as a novelist that I write. Khadidzé did not throw in her lot with mine. To make matters worse, I got wind, quite accidentally, of a correspondence, quite as lyrical as ours, which she was carrying on with another officer. . . . I did not let her know what I had found out, but I felt very bitter. Disillusioned, and quite sure that I knew all that was to be known about the perfidy of the female heart, I decided to take the first opportunity that offered of going to some distant country. If I mention this insignificant episode here, it is only because it played a certain part in determining my destiny.

The opportunity for which I was looking came soon. On his appointment as Soviet ambassador to Bokhara, Iouréniev immediately asked Trotsky to let him have five officers with a knowledge of Oriental languages. Iouréniev, though little known to the general public, was a first-class man. He had entered the ranks of the Bolshevik Party in 1917, together with Manouilsky, Lunatcharsky and Joffe. These four men had brought over with them a Social Democratic group which, up to that time, had stood aloof from the two original divisions of the Left organisation, the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks. Before the final seizure of power he had been one of the organisers of the Petrograd Red Guards. He was a member of the earliest War Councils of the Red Army, and was later made President of the Soviet Executive at Koursk, where he met Mejlaouk. He received me at the old Hotel National which was being used at that time as Soviet Headquarters. He was a thick-set little man with an energetic face, dressed in a military tunic. "We are going to make an effort", he told me, "to establish a Soviet régime in Bokhara. . . ." Before the Revolution the Emirate of Bokhara, a Russian enclave in Central Asia, had enjoyed the official status of a Protectorate, though its feudal organisation had been left untouched. In 1917 a Young Bokhara Party had been formed, had driven the Emir from his country, and had declared its adhesion to the Russian Revolution. The leader of this movement, Fayçoulla Khodjaev, was said to be an astute and able man who thought in terms of the future. Bokhara remained independent with a government of its own. Moscow had agreed to send an ambassador and, in view of the sudden death of Aprélev, Iouréniev was the man chosen for the post. Karakhan signed our diplomatic passports.

It was a curious mission, rather like those which, during the Middle Ages, used to be sent to almost unknown kingdoms. We filled a whole train (a hospital train temporarily put at our service, with the addition of a first-class coach). Apart from the diplomatic personnel, which included a cook and a number of typists, we took with us a detachment of Red soldiers, a quantity of food, medical supplies, weapons, articles for barter, and a quantity of presents. The married members of the party travelled with their families. The total number of persons was forty-six. In normal times the journey should take five days; we were on the road for twenty-four. The sun poured down its burning heat on the steppes and the waste lands through which we travelled. The stations at which we called were in ruins. But it was a gorgeous trip. Men, and sometimes women, lay half-naked on the carriage roofs enjoying the warmth. We all felt at the top of our form, conscious that we were on the way to adventure, with a great mission to accomplish, and ready meanwhile to enjoy an unexpected rest-cure. Three weeks previously a similar train had taken into Central Asia, Raskolnikov, the first Soviet ambassador to Afghanistan, his wife, the charming and intrepid Larissa Reisner, and their suite. After having fought the Whites at the head of the Volga flotilla, Raskolnikov, the "red midshipman", had tried to work up a revolution in Persia. Now he was to be in Kabul the spokesman of the peace-time policy of the Soviets. To reach his destination he would have to travel from Bokhara on horseback across mountain passes and deserts. The journey from Moscow to Kabul took him more than three months.

The First Secretary was a man called André Bodrov. He had been a metal-worker in Petersburg, and was later appointed head of the Political Department attached to Boudienny's cavalry force. He did a turn of duty as a diplomat before undertaking the construction and direction, under Kaganovitch, of the great ball-bearing factory (Charikopodchipnik) in Moscow. I shall have more to say of him later. . . .

An unknown woman traveller occupied a reserved coupé in the first-class coach. She was said to be the widow of a Bokhara diplomat, and I expected to see a small, Asiatic woman with a dark sun-tanned skin. Imagine my surprise, therefore, when I was introduced to a young and beautiful woman of the purest Russian type, who appeared to carry the weight of her sorrow with much lightness of heart. She was, in fact, the widow of the former Soviet ambassador to Bokhara, Aprélev, whose death I have already mentioned. She was going back to Central Asia, from a desire to escape from the Muscovite world, to avoid personal successes for which she had no heart and to take up a solitary and self-sufficient life. As our journey grew longer and longer she found among us a sort of Muscovite world in miniature. Most of the men were at her feet. I used to see her surrounded by my companions, occasionally accepting their invitations as a form of distraction, but relapsing later into a state of dissatisfaction with us and with herself. She had confessed to me her desire for solitude. I answered her in something like the following words:

"If you really want to be left alone, I think I can offer you a solution of your difficulties. So long as you remain on your own, a desirable and attractive young woman, you are bound to attract the attention of a lot of young fellows whose lives are thick set with dangers. I have, myself, just suffered a profound disappointment and, as a result, can regard you with a certain degree of detachment. . . . If you wish to retain your liberty and to ensure that you are treated with respect, I offer you a purely nominal marriage. Officially, you will be my wife; actually you will be completely unfettered. We shall both consider ourselves entirely free. How does the idea appeal to you?"

Olga Fédorovna laughed gaily as I unfolded this scheme, but when she realised that I was quite serious she said:

"I accept. We will be married as soon as we get to Bokhara."

We announced the good news to our companions. I responded to the congratulations showered upon me without turning a hair.

The diplomatic train arrived eventually at Tashkent, a city combining modernity with the spirit of the East, a little provincial town lying within a ring of suburbs. A marvellous sun heightened every colour, gave a new value to all we saw, and quickened the blood in our veins. Iouréniev told me to go with him to the headquarters of the Commission appointed by the Central Committee of the Party in charge of Turkestan affairs—a body known officially as Tourkkommissia. We started early to avoid the heat of the day, having ascertained the address of this important organisation. Our way lay along broad, quiet streets, lined with gardens, and made pleasant by the sound of irrigation streams and the song of birds. We came to a small, light-coloured house apparently wrapped in sleep, with a simple notice-board over the door, and a drowsy porter. This was our goal. We entered, for the gate stood open and the porter seemed incurious. We found ourselves in the outer hall. I pushed open a door, lifted a curtain, and saw a room with bare walls in which two men were lying asleep on mattresses and cushions arranged on the floor. At my entrance they jumped up.

"What's the matter? Who are you?"

"The Soviet Embassy has arrived. I'm looking for the Turkestan Commission."

"That's us."

They spoke no less than the truth. Standing half-dressed before us they appeared, one as a tall fellow with spectacles and curly hair, his strong features set in a round face, the other smaller, with a cropped head, a large nose, his upper lip marked with a faint moustache. I recognised them from their portraits, for both were members of the Central Committee and former collaborators of Lenin. It was because he had shown himself vaguely opposed to Lenin's policy in the matter of the Trades Unions that the shorter of the two had been appointed to this confidential mission. The small man with the moustache was Tomsky, president of the Central Council of Soviet Trades Unions, a lithographic worker, one of the oldest members of the Party, and president of one of the first Soviets ever founded, at Reval, in 1905.[1] His tall bespectacled colleague was called Roudzoutak, later to become a member of the Political Bureau.

Tea was brought us while the Tourkkommissia, having adjourned to the office (maps, telephones and typewriters), gave us the details of a situation which could not, without exaggeration, have been described as brilliant. The military front in this part of the world was constantly moving, and the troops, consisting of widely separated Red columns, suffered more from malaria than from the enemy. The malaria was of a peculiarly virulent type, and no body of men could resist it for long. The *basmatchi*, champions of Mohammedanism, held most of the country, drawing their supplies from Afghanistan, Persia and India. The Emir of Bokhara had renounced none of his claims. At the present moment he was in hiding in the mountains. The peasants, discouraged by armed invasions and requisitions, had left most of their land uncultivated. There was already a shortage of food; there would soon be famine. The Civil War had devastated all the eastern part of the principality of Bokhara. The Young Bokhara Party did not inspire confidence. It was divided into two groups based on political and blood affiliations —the Khodjaev, led by Fayçoulla Khodjaev, and the Moukhedinov. The Khodjaev seemed to be the most modern in outlook and more inclined to be loyal to us. The Pan–Hindu Revolutionary Committee, brought into existence and supported by the Executive Committee of the Communist International, was carrying on its activities with a certain degree of success. A school of Hindu officers was functioning under its protection and training the future leaders of a Red Army destined to carry revolution to India. . . .

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[1] Charged with working against the Party and its leaders, and hunted by the police, Tomsky committed suicide in 1937.

Anxious to know more of this Pan–Hindu Committee, I got its address and proceeded to pay it a visit. The house to which I was directed was a single-story building with no notice-board to indicate its nature. At the corner of the street a shoe-black was dreaming away the hours.

"Can you tell me," I asked him, "where the Pan–Hindu Committee has its quarters?"

He could tell me nothing. He was not particularly interested in revolutionary committees and had no desire to conquer India. In speaking to him I had raised my voice. The angry face of a young man with large eyes and a little black beard, showed itself at an open window just above our heads. Its possessor laid a finger to his lips and made me a sign to enter by a neighbouring door. I obeyed. He came out to meet me.

"This is it, this is the Committee. But what do you mean by shouting like that? The Committee doesn't exist officially at all. The government has promised the English to dissolve it."

The notice-board had been taken down, the typewriters removed, and the military school transferred to another, phantom, committee. The bearded man introduced himself as Tivel, an Orientalist, former secretary to Zinoviev, an Orientalist like himself, and president of the Pan–Hindu organisation. His two colleagues, sent with him from Moscow, after having been given their instructions by Zinoviev, Radek and Pavlovitch-Weltman, were named Goldberg and Friedland. . . . Having expected to find Hindus, I was not a little surprised! Tivel, with his lustreless skin and his black eyes might, at a pinch, have passed for one. He made me a present of a Hindustani grammar. I was to meet him again in Moscow in 1935, where, with Radek, he was at the head of Stalin's private foreign information bureau. Not long after he was accused of having plotted the death of the dictator.

CHAPTER XI

THE FEUDAL EAST AND THE SOVIET

FROM Tashkent to Bokhara is no more than four hundred and fifty kilometres as the crow flies, and a little less than double that distance by rail. The train takes you through a mountainous country full of flowers and sunshine, which would be one of the gardens of the world were it not for wars and tyrannies. Bokhara itself is surrounded by walls constructed of clay. Sentinels watch from the towers; others guard the gates. Just outside lie many orchards, full of apple trees and apricots and thick, luxuriant grass.

The Soviet Mission made an impressive entry into the city. Light four-wheeled carriages, drawn by thoroughbreds, carried us at full speed through streets so narrow that the pedestrians had to flatten themselves against the walls at our approach, and it was a miracle that we crushed nobody in our furious onset. The natives wear parti-coloured *khalats*, the women having their faces entirely concealed by black veils. No windows look on to the narrow alleys. The houses, constructed round interior courtyards, are shut away from the world with which they communicate through old gateways, sometimes carved and never without a knocker for the use of visitors. Such is Old Bokhara, built round its rich bazaar into which we dashed at our headlong gallop. From the gloom of the streets sweltering under a blazing sky, we were transported into the refreshing shade of a vast covered market, divided into aisles swarming with humanity and overflowing with rich merchandise. It was like a scene from the *Arabian Nights*. The shops encroached upon the footway. One could sit and drink a cup of coffee or squat, bargaining, on a carpet among a crowd of Parsees, Hindus, Turks, Uzbeks, Greeks, Chinese, Russians, and Jews. All the riches of Asia were there, stuffed in sacks, chests and gourds, displayed in baskets or trays, or hung from the ceilings. Wandering pedlars circulated among the crowd vending sweetmeats or refreshing drinks. The place was a jumbled motley of the secret East. The women, their own faces hidden by their veils, stared curiously at ours. . . . And then, as it were in a flash, our carriage had dashed through a second gate and once more the blaze of the deep blue sky was an almost physical weight upon our heads.

At the Soviet Embassy I found a staff on the members of which even quinine had ceased to have any curative effect. Everyone was down with fever—with the variety peculiar to Central Asia which kills as often as not, and when it does not kill leaves the victim sucked dry of all energy. We found ourselves about to relieve an office full of ghosts riddled with malaria.

I set to work to learn the details of the situation. Bokhara, with its conflicting loyalties to Khodjaev and Moukhedinov, is, in form, a People's Republic ruled by a Council of Nazirs which corresponds vaguely to our Councils of People's Commissars. The Nazirs are all local men of importance, and are members of the Young Bokhara Party which draws its inspiration from the young Turks and dreams of a national renaissance in conformity with the ideals held by the younger generation of more enlightened merchants. The term "Chovra-Soviet" sounds oddly in a country which possesses neither modern technical equipment, modern industries, nor a working class. Local handicraft suffices for all purposes of trade and use. Since the 14th century the Khans of Bokhara have been petty despots living secure and independent existences behind the defences of their deserts. The last Emir—he still holds his court somewhere in the eastern wilds of the country—waged a long struggle against the revolutionary influences coming from Russia, and imprisoned the members of the Young Bokhara Party, many of whom he condemned to torture and death. Khodjaev emerged from hiding to place himself at the head of a force of workmen and merchants who had staged an insurrection on the approach of a Red Army in the September of the previous year (1920) under the command of Kolessov. The Russian artillery decided the outcome of the day.

A Bokhara Communist Party was formed and given the standing of "sympathiser" in the organisation of the Communist International. The property of the Emir and of the great nobles was confiscated, but not a finger was laid upon that of the merchants and farmers. A Cheka was installed under the control of a number of Russians. It arrested suspects but shot nobody. The Popular Government is conducted in exactly the same way as government in Bokhara has been conducted for hundreds of years. I have seen a Nazir, or minister, squatting on a carpet and dictating decrees to a scribe who wrote them in old Persian characters on a board balanced on his knees. While this was proceeding there was a constant coming and going of young men with almond-shaped eyes, some of whom had put on leather jerkins and strapped revolvers to their hips without managing to give themselves the slightest suspicion of a military air. I was told that the Emir had taken his harem with him but left his "male favourites" behind, and that several of these latter, after having been attached to the officials of the new régime had themselves ultimately achieved office. . . .

The new masters of Bokhara may have need of our assistance, but at heart they regard us as enemies. The power of the Soviets is still, for them, the power of Russia; and they fear it. We meddle as little as possible with their internal affairs, of which, as a matter of fact, we know scarcely anything. The Bokhara Communists hold their committees in the evening after the business of the day. If it were not for the ceaseless energy of Fayçoulla Khodjaev, the Turkish sympathies of the Moukhedin group would long ago have gained the day.

Khodjaev was so small that he was sometimes nicknamed "the Lenin of the Uzbeks", and was the victim of a devouring energy in spite of the malaria which often gave to his face a greenish tinge. He was in love with life, and could laugh gaily beneath an almost crushing load of work. He knew his people, was a great orator and a clever politician. He was much beloved. . . . He alone was capable of devising terms in which the little revolution of Bokhara and its big brother of Russia could understand one another. Later, he was instrumental in settling with the Central Committee the national frontiers of Turkestan. He brought unity to his people, and was to become head of the government of Uzbekistan and one of the seven presidents of the U.S.S.R. He came to a tragic and iniquitous end, being condemned at the trial of "the Twenty-one" as a Fascist spy, and shot in 1938.

I several times went to see him. On such occasions, after crossing the inner courtyard of his house, I entered a huge room absolutely empty and painted white. To reach his office at the opposite end, I had to go fifty paces across a carpeted floor. His appearance was sickly, but there was a look of energy in his face, and his eyes were piercing. He wore a simple military tunic, though when he appeared in public he always put on a turban and draped himself in a *khalat*.

His rival, Moukhedinov, an Oriental of the traditional type, received me squatting on his heels, dressed in silken robes, in a dark little room of the Emir's palace, to reach which I had to pass under a number of ruined arches flanking a memorial tower, cross the gardens which were full of golden pheasants and of peacocks, and skirt the barred windows of the former seraglio.

A contingent of Russian troops held the strategic valley of Harm, known as the "valley of death" by reason of the fevers that haunted it. Ninety per cent of our men fell victims to them. The garrison had to be relieved every two months. Quinine was useless.

As Military Attaché I had to travel through the length and breadth of the country. The modern city, Russian in appearance and otherwise without interest, stands about eight kilometres from Old Bokhara. Rather nearer is a Jewish city, a sort of Eastern ghetto, where for centuries there has lived a Jewish type of great racial purity and of a beauty worthy of its Biblical past. I shall never forget the impression made upon me by the women and children whom I saw in the poverty-stricken alleys as I rode by. Under the Emir's rule the Jews had to wear round their waists, as a sign of servitude, a rope instead of a girdle. After the revolution, those who could afford them bought belts and wore them with an ostentatious air. Shulamites, whose praises old Solomon would have delighted in singing, came to their doors and smiled a welcome to us.

Olga Fédorovna and I had agreed to get married as soon as we arrived. A friend of my fiancée undertook all the preparations, and did so with enthusiasm, quite ignorant of the fact that the ceremony was to be a mere formality the only object of which was to assure the young widow a peaceful existence. Iouréniev lent us his private carriage for the visit to the civil authorities, and it arrived for us filled with flowers. At the last moment we discovered that we were without a witness, but I caught sight in the street of one of my colleagues, our Consul in Sinkiang, whom I pressed into service.

Nothing could be simpler than the registration of a marriage.

"Be happy," said the Soviet functionary, closing his ledger—and that was all.

We repaired to a little Georgian restaurant of the kind that, all over Eastern Russia, enjoys the monopoly of serving grilled mutton and sweet and dry wines. The landlord paid us the usual compliments. He was a fat, sly, smiling Georgian, wearing a purple velvet cap and embroidered slippers. Darkness fell, and I wished my wife good night before retiring to the terrace where I slept in the open air. . . . Our friend was distinctly worried. Wasn't she in part responsible for the happiness of the newly married couple? She had worked so hard to make everything a success. She could not believe her eyes, and the explanations which we quietly gave her seemed incredible. We had made a fool of her, then, made fools of everybody? The whole thing was a sham, was that it? Maroussia felt cheated, and in a burst of disappointed anger told us that she had never seen such a couple of fools.

I spent that night and many others alone upon my terrace beneath the stars.

Olga Fédorovna soon succumbed to fever. Our attitude to one another was one of politeness slightly modified by familiarity. I would go and put a few flowers on her bedside table and inquire after her health, after which I would mount my horse and set off on my round of inspections. I don't quite know how it was that things began to go wrong between us. A day came when she reproached me with a lack of attentiveness, though I had been priding myself on handling a delicate situation with the greatest tact. I remember that, on one occasion, after an exchange of sharp words while my horses were pawing the ground under the windows, I hastily withdrew. Riding through the streets, I recalled a look of chagrin on my wife's face, and the recollection filled me suddenly with such joy that I dug my spurs into my horse's flank, and set off at a gallop at the head of my party. I was the only good rider of the lot, and we jumped streams and dashed through a number of gardens at top speed. Iouréniev was nearly thrown. I made no reply to his curses. Our furious ride continued. My companions all risked their necks. Finally Iouréniev got so angry that he drew his pistol and told me to pull up.

"If you hadn't obeyed," he said later when he had recovered his composure, "I swear I'd have shot your horse."

At regular intervals attacks of fever kept me tossing and turning on my bed. I was attended at such times by a sailor from the Red flotilla of Amour-Daria—that extraordinary collection of old hulks which still continued to play a considerable part in the events of the day. Micha brought with him his wife, a little Russian peasant woman who shared her husband's liking for cognac. . . . Olga Fédorovna, from her room below, could hear them drinking, laughing and singing. I had some bad moments, trying every now and then to check the fever with bumpers of brandy. Olga Fédorovna felt herself offended, while I felt myself neglected, without realising that I had deliberately put myself in a false position. At last, Olga Fédorovna made up her mind to go back to Russia, and I carried her bag to the carriage. We exchanged a few last words fraught with a double sadness. I too, was on the point of departure—for Karchi, where I had been appointed Consul and resident military expert. Karchi was a small, half-abandoned town, standing at the foot of the mountains less than two hundred kilometres from the Afghan frontier. My predecessor and his wife had just fallen victims to malaria. The troops there, consisting of a brigade of Soviet infantry, were decimated with fever. The Bokhara Communists of the place divided their time between trade, praying in the mosques, and attending to public business. Relations were strained between them and ourselves, since they were obviously unwilling to supply us with food and were complaining of requisitions.

"The Red Army must live," I told them, "Don't forget that if we go the Emir's *basmatchi* will come and cut all your throats."

My argument, however sound, did not prevent them from hanging on to their sacks of flour and rice. However the town had twice been looted by bands of *basmatchi*. A third of the houses were in ruins, their occupants having been murdered or having taken to the mountains as an alternative. It was sad to see the dilapidated shells of buildings standing there in the sunlight surrounded by vineyards which produce grapes of exceptional plumpness and sweetness. The soldiers led a boring existence. Each week we buried a number of men who had died of fever. Our Intelligence Service kept us informed of the movements of the *basmatchi*, who were in close touch with the English. Several Europeans wandered about among the enemy tribes lying between Afghanistan and the desert, buying food and paying for it with gold and silver.

CHAPTER XII

FROM BOKHARA TO THE CAFÉ DE PÉGASE

I STAYED at Karchi only about two months, quite long enough, however, to ruin my health. At the end of October 1921 the Military College recalled all pupils seconded on special missions. Fever was not the only trouble: I suffered from abscesses, a common enough ailment among Europeans in those sub-tropical regions where, at certain periods of the autumn and winter the cold is considerable. I used to dictate my orders and my mail lying in bed, my feet stretched out towards a sort of stove which stood in the middle of the room, and in which a gentle fire was maintained. I received my visitors in the same posture: in fact, I avoided standing up as much as possible. My left foot was so covered with open sores that I could not wear a boot on it, and had to go about with one foot in a boot and the other in a Turkish slipper. My school friend Khassis was a little farther north at Fergana, where he commanded the Red division quartered in Turkestan. He had had the happy idea of sending us poor exiles in Karchi several small barrels of a peculiarly aromatic and health-giving wine. . . . Alas, pledge though the wine might be of brotherly affection, it did not succeed in putting me on my feet again.

Though I bore the title of Consul, I had no consular duties to perform. What I did in fact was to fill the functions of a military officer in a district living under Russian protection. My only companion was a Lett, brought to this country by a series of fantastic accidents, and now acting as commander of the Bokhara militia—a picturesque agglomeration of turbaned and ragged ruffians, most of whom had been *basmatchis* in the past or were certain to be in the future. This Lett used to spend his evenings with me on the flat roof of the consulate, a huge house devoid of all furniture, the emptiness of which was not made less depressing by a few scattered carpets. The roof looked down into deserted courtyards and narrow streets in which nothing moved save an occasional jackal on the prowl for food. We could see the crouching shadows of these animals cast by the magic brightness of the moon. Many of the neighbouring houses had been abandoned. Sometimes the moon rode in the sky, sometimes the stars were our only light. My Lettish companion tuned his guitar and charmed our shared loneliness with romantic songs that never varied.

> Two harlequins, so I've heard tell
> Once loved a maid with golden hair:
> At the end of the world the moonlight fell
> On their joys and sorrows and loves and care.
> What an idiot's tale is life!

My working day was, as a rule, over about five o'clock. The officers of our brigade would come to see me with complaints about rations and a request to be allowed to requisition food from the inhabitants. Officers of the Bokhara army would pay a visit to ask my advice, to get me to translate a telegram or to help them to make out a map. At five o'clock a bout of fever would get me and never leave me till darkness fell. I used to rise from my couch quite exhausted.

Nothing broke the monotony of my days except occasional visits from one of the Moukhedinov family, president of the Central Executive Committee of the Republic, and from Arifov, the Nazir, or minister, for Defence. They were on their way to some of the *basmatchi* chiefs with whom they hoped to patch up one of those precarious peaces which had not even the authority of a truce but allowed an opportunity for a lot of dishonest bargaining and backstairs intrigue. Having broken the journey at the house of some rich notable, they invited me to a reception which was held on a flat roof covered with carpets. The master of the ceremonies provided a feast of roast mutton and rice, after which a party of Uzbek musicians set their strings twanging and whining to an accompaniment of thudding tambourines. This music, so different from our own, has an undeniable charm which the hearer feels at once. The two government officials had brought with them their "boy favourites", graceful young adolescents of twelve or fifteen whom it seemed odd to see in uniform. They started to dance, which they did admirably, trained as they had been to the art since their earliest infancy. Arifov had had the idea of recruiting a body of musicians from among them. . . . I ought to say here, that I found homosexuality very widespread among the richer inhabitants of Bokhara.

I could not help feeling a little suspicious of allies who travelled so accompanied, but I had to show them some courtesy in return, so I arranged for a party at the consulate. While it was in progress the Nazir and the president continued to perform their official functions. They would interrupt their drinking of tea or wine to the sound of guttural singing, to take the seals of state from some inner pocket of their *khalats*, and, after spitting on them to moisten the traces of ink still adhering, apply them solemnly to various documents—decrees, rescripts, or judical decisions. . . . So much, at times, for human justice! . . . Because of the sudden cold of the evenings, these two gentlemen borrowed my best uniform greatcoat and my carriage, and departed after a formal exchange of courtesies, sped on their way by almost lyrical good wishes on my part. They departed, and I never saw them again, for they deserted to the enemy with their uniformed "favourites", their guitar-players, their scribes—and my brand new greatcoat! The carriage, doubtless because it was no further use to them when they got to the end of the road system, was returned to me. . . . How right Khodjaev was, I thought, to warn us against the Moukhedins with their traditions of wealth, and to advise us to trust nobody but the men whom formerly the Emir had condemned to the bastinado. . . .

Malaria had sucked me dry of all energy. The old doctor attached to the brigade, who was usually drunk, tried to persuade me in vain to take a course of spirits. I preferred to wait until I could undergo a different sort of treatment. My order of recall came as a great relief. I handed over to my secretary, and got into my carriage. With me I took a considerable fortune consisting of a sack of white flour, a sack of dried raisins, an embroidered cap, two silk *khalats* given me by the leading men of the Republic, and a warm wrap. During the journey I had to sleep more than once with one eye open, so great a temptation was all this wealth to marauders.

The Volga district was still suffering from famine. The stopping-places were a wretched sight, either completely deserted or else swarming with poor creatures in the last stages of despair. The American Relief was carrying on with its work and offering a helping hand. There was shortage of food in Moscow as well, but that was no new thing there and rationing was organised. There were fewer sudden deaths: suffering was longer drawn out. But, at least so far as my own generation of militants was concerned, the situation was faced with cheerfulness. The city was filthy with thaw when I got out of the train laden with my sacks and still wearing one high cavalry boot and one coloured velvet Turkish slipper. There were no horses to be seen. I managed to get hold of a sort of coolie with a hand-sledge on to which I packed all my perishable goods, while I limped off towards the Hotel Livadia which was reserved for the use of those attached to the Military College. . . .

This institution had undergone a Communist purge. I had experienced such things before, having been present at two purges at Gomel. When the worst danger had passed, the Party called its members together and proceeded to ask them what they had done, what they had become, during the period of crisis. In the case of those who had lain hidden, no explanation was accepted. They were quickly detected and at once deprived of their membership cards. . . . The first man to be called before the public session of the Purge Commission was the head of the War College. The room was filled with officers of the Moscow garrison. Toukhatchevsky already enjoyed a certain reputation as a result of his captivity in Germany, his loyalty to the Revolution at its most critical moment, his victorious campaign on the Volga, and his war experience in Poland. We all knew that in 1918 he had been one of the first to form, under Trotsky's political direction, a Red Army worthy of the name. He took his stand before his judges, a young man with a square-cut, energetic face, dressed in a private's tunic, dignified, unconcerned, with not the least suspicion of pose in his attitude. His only distinguishing mark was the Order of the Red Flag which had recently been instituted. With the Schmidts and the Boudiennys he had well deserved it. The simplicity of his appearance pleased us, for among our own colleagues, and in the higher ranks of the army, we had already had enough of amateurs in resplendent uniforms. One staff officer in particular—at Frounzé—who had started as a workman in a textile mill—was well known for his taste in dress—red breeches, red tunic, even red cap, with badges of rank, braid, and all the rest of it.

It was in a tone of almost complete detachment that Toukhatchevsky spoke to an absorbed and silent audience of his past record.

". . . entered the Red Army in 1918; parentage aristocratic; formerly subaltern in the Imperial Guard; captured by the Germans; escaped. While in the Red Army commanded first a division, then an army on the Eastern Front. By special decree of the president of the Revolutionary War Council was decorated with the Order of the Red Flag for having inflicted a decisive defeat on Koltchak. Was later commander-in-chief on the Western Front. Before joining the Communist Party had been a member of no political organisation. Since joining the Party had been subjected to no disciplinary action. . . ."

The members of the commission put a few short questions which Toukhatchevsky answered in the same laconic mnaner. One or two nods were exchanged, and then the president promulgated the board's decision: "Michael Toukhatchevsky, a member of the Party since 1918, and acting at present as director of the War College, is declared worthy to retain his membership."

Toukhatchevsky then came down from the platform amid general applause.

The next to be dealt with was a big man with a strongly marked profile, who held his head proudly. This was Jacques Blumkin who, if only he would give free rein to his natural eloquence could unfold one of the most romantic life-stories imaginable.

"By birth I am a Jew and a bourgeois. After passing through college I became a professional revolutionary, and was formerly a member of the Social Revolutionary Party of the Left. Acting on instructions from the Central Committee of my Party, I killed Count Mirbach, the German ambassador, in July 1918. I organised and administered clandestine organisations in rear of the White Armies in the Ukraine. I was attached to the P.C.R., and fulfilled several confidential missions in the course of which I was more than once wounded. As a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Persia, I took part with Koutchouk-Khan in the fighting in that country. . . ."

Blumkin too was declared "worthy of the high distinction of membership of the Party of the Proletariat".

Iouri Sablin took his turn at the bar. He, like Blumkin, was formerly a member of the Social Revolutionary Party, and had been largely responsible for the success in Moscow of the October insurrection. . . .

My friend Briquet was excluded from the Party, though I spoke in his defence. He came of a bourgeois family, and the Commission decided that his record of active service left a good deal to be desired. He was "excluded as a time-server". I knew that he had behaved at the front with conspicuous gallantry, and that he was a convinced Communist. This unjust decision was ultimately reversed; but until it was, Briquet suffered from a severe sense of shock.

Toukhatchevsky was not destined to remain for long in charge of our studies at the College. The Government put him in charge of the troops sent to suppress the serious peasant rising which had broken out in the Tambov district under the leadership of an ex-Social Revolutionary schoolmaster called Antonov. The Party handed over the headship of the College to another senior officer named Hekker, whose acquaintanceship I made in the following circumstances:

We students had all assembled in the great hall of the College to hear the new director's inaugural address. I sat down at a table beside another student who seemed rather older than myself, on the small side, with curly hair of an auburn colour, a small moustache, and delicate hands. . . . "A shame Toukhatchevsky's going, isn't it?" I said. "I don't suppose the new man's nearly as good, do you?" "We can only wait and see," he said, with a smile.

The proceedings continued; finally the president said:

"The director of the College will now address the meeting."

My neighbour rose and walked quietly to the platform. It was Hekker. He spoke concisely, without using a word too many. His object, he said, would be to promote regularity in our studies and a spirit of companionship in our personal relations. He was as good as his word. Discipline was strengthened, but not to the detriment of the spirit of the students which reached a very high level indeed.

The circumstances of our first meeting created a bond of sympathy between us. Hekker, who always referred to me as "the Benjamin of the College", was more than my senior officer; he was almost my friend. In after years he became Military Attaché, first in the Far East and then in Turkey, before taking up an appointment as Chef du Protocole—that is, as the official in charge of all dealings with foreigners—on the staff of Voroshilov, the People's Commissar for Defence. His high qualities as a soldier have set him apart from his fellows. He may not move much in the public eye, but, for all that, he is regarded as a man of great importance. I shall have more to say of him later.

Moscow was hungry. In defending Briquet against undeserved disciplinary action I had made two friends. One of these was his young wife, who, at that time, was pursuing her studies at the Communist Sverdlov University, or, as it was commonly known, "The Republic of Sverdlovia". And a remarkably original republic it was too, composed of young enthusiasts drawn from every corner of the empire, who had come here to feed their fill on "ideas". Sverdlovia took a passionate interest in anything to do with politics, in Marxist theory, in the events of the day, in the "new" poetry. Sverdlovia had its cliques and its crises. Groups of us—officer cadets from the Military College and "Sverdlovian" students of the Party School of Political Theory—used to meet in my room or the Briquets', shivering with cold, to drink the boiling water which did duty for tea though not the smallest scrap of tea had ever got anywhere near it. Dried raisins from Karchi we had in abundance, and, since there was an entire absence of sugar in Moscow, they were a rare dainty. The room would be full of young women and young men sitting cross-legged on the bed, the divan and the carpet. Somebody would start discussing an article of Bukharin's, or one of the girls would fling open the window, though outside there were twenty degrees of biting frost, because she needed air, icy though it might be, and a sense of space, and because the poem which she was about to recite, in a deep man's voice which made the occasional passers-by stop to listen, demanded as background the murmur of the city streets. Verse after verse dropped from her lips of Mayakowsky's "Keep to the Left", with its "brazen note of bugles from the barricades".

In the general state of poverty then obtaining, the Military College enjoyed a number of material privileges which permitted its members to play, to some extent, the part of patrons. Our club became one of the best in Moscow. The most famous actors, the most celebrated poets declaimed before us. Not only did they find in us an appreciative audience, but we helped them to keep alive by paying them not in money but in food. After an evening dedicated to Art with a big A, I used to see some of the most famous performers and writers being taken home in the carriages belonging to the College, or pulling out of the entrance hall a hand-sledge on which was piled the generous sack of provisions which was our contribution to the occasion. Nejdanova, Sobinov, Petrov, the leading singers from the Moscow Opera, Mordkin the famous ballet master, Trétiakov, Asséev, Mayakowsky, best known of contemporary poets, would shower on us their gifts, receiving in exchange rice and barley, sugar, herrings, and even butter! For man cannot live on bread or on genius alone.

Meyerhold would sometimes entertain us in his theatre. That amazing producer had just put on the stage Mayakowsky's *Mystères-Bouffes*, part satire, part epic, part tragedy and part burlesque, the scene of which is set half in Heaven and half on earth. It was Mayakowsky at his best handled by Meyerhold at his most inspired, and I sometimes wonder whether the audience of those days, made up as it was of soldiers, students, workmen and intellectuals of the Revolution, starving perhaps, but rich in hope, was not the best that those two men of genius could have found anywhere. We sat in the theatre in our overcoats, for it was bitterly cold. Meyerhold, thin as a rake, his head in the air, the collar of his coat turned up to his ears, jumped about the stage which no curtain separated from the auditorium, rushed into the wings, now giving a push to some theatre mechanic, now shouting last-minute instructions to some actor petrified with nervousness, who in a minute or so, would appear from the clouds on the top of a symbolic scaffolding to denounce the inhumanity of war. Mayakowsky, from his place in the audience, now and again leapt to his feet to shout something in his street-orator's voice. And when the show was over, we walked home all together through the empty streets, moving rhythmically over the glittering snow, repeating lines, or epigrams, or scraps of verse. What has happened to Meyerhold? Is he in prison? Can he still enjoy some ghostly remnant of liberty? His theatre has been closed, his company disbanded. He himself has been dubbed "cheap-jack" and condemned as inefficient. As to Mayakowsky, it is some years now since he put an end to his own *mystères-bouffes* by blowing out his brains, though Stalin has since recognised him as the greatest poet produced by the Revolution.

Moscow at that time enjoyed an extraordinarily rich, and endlessly experimental, intellectual life. Most of the great thinkers of the immediate past had either emigrated, or spent their time grumbling at the new régime. One great poet of pre-Revolutionary days, Valère Brioussov, surprised everybody by becoming a Communist. All his old friends broke with him. On every side the young were swarming, filled with a fiery enthusiasm which was unlike anything that had ever been known till then. Revolutionary Marxism, with its spokesmen, Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Preobrajensky, Riazanov, Lunatcharsky and Karl Radek, that magnificent pleiad of men of action, theorists, thinkers, politicians and moralists, was questioning every human value and laying the foundations of a new world. There was an answer to everything, and if, sometimes, maybe, the answer was too categorical, it was at least splendidly vital, stimulating the mind and setting the imagination on fire. Into international politics, law, military tactics, ethics, sexual problems, literature, painting—everything, a new life was injected. What a contrast to the grey sterility of the U.S.S.R. to-day, where no one dares do more than paraphrase the mediocre speeches of the Secretary-General, where even the poets may do no more than praise him in verse, as do the writers of prose in their own medium! Under the patronage of Lunatcharsky, Moscow, at the end of the civil war period, was a promised land for poets and painters. The painters invented new movements—constructivism, suprematism; nor were the poets far behind them with their imagism and their "néant-ism" (in Russian *nitchevoki*). . . . The poets used to sit in the cafés at the centre of the city, wretched co-operative affairs, where one could drink coffee made from chestnuts and tea brewed from carrots, sweetened with saccharine or with microscopic pieces of sugar, but where one could always be sure of hearing genuine poets of twenty-five, like Essenin, Mayakowsky, Selbinsky, Asséev, Trétiakov. When they had finished declaiming their verses, we would club together and offer them a glass of coffee and a cake. . . .

This was no organised Bohemia, no commercialised Montparnasse, worked up by a lot of picture-dealers and proprietors of places like the *Dome* and the *Coupole*, a Bohemia that for the most part is a bogus hotch-potch of disgruntled foreigners. It was the real thing, where despair was genuine and rarely stopped short of suicide, where enthusiasm was authentic and, as like as not, would produce masterpieces. There are still men alive who can remember that time.

One of the most popular of the cafés frequented by the poets was known as "*The Stall of Pegasus*". The winged steed spread his golden pinions when some poet dressed in a peasant's blouse cried:

"I am a ne'er-do-well
As is the wind that blows . . ."

but it was a skinny beast, this Pegasus of ours, with a manger as ill-stocked as the restaurants of the Republic. The first edible pastries were those of the N.E.P. With an uprush of emotion we saw again, in 1921, butter and sugar and cream. Pegasus pawed the ground!

I lost no time in taking my wife there, for I had settled down, quite unexpectedly, for good with my nominal mate, Olga Fédorovna. We had carried on a correspondence on the subject of getting a divorce. She wanted it as a means of freeing both of us from a false situation, but, owing to the fact that she was living in the provinces while I was in Moscow, there were difficulties. Her letters were very formal and polite, almost indifferent. In a postscript to one of them, however, she told me that she was still suffering from a recrudescence of malaria. I was in the same boat, but I was undergoing treatment at the Institute of Tropical Diseases. The doctors promised me a complete cure in three months. Needless to say, it never happened, but I sometimes believed it might. I wrote to Olga Fédorovna saying that I was determined that she should see my doctors. Did I believe in the possibility of a cure, or was it simply that I wanted to meet her again? Since this is not a novel I shall refrain from going into that psychological problem. I was working for my examinations alone, since the Tartar officer who shared my room was in hospital fighting for his life against an attack of typhoid. I had taken him downstairs on my back a few days earlier and put him in an ambulance. . . . Suddenly, Olga Fédorovna knocked at my door. It was snowing. She entered, swathed in furs, her colour heightened by the cold, and joy entered with her. The question of divorce was more urgent even than the question of medical treatment. But why should we divorce? Hadn't we been foolish enough already? On the spur of the moment we agreed that we had, and there and then began for me one of the happiest periods of my life.

Next day I appeared before old General Martynov, the writer of the Russo–Japanese war, to take my examination in history. Martynov knew that I had worked hard and questioned me kindly on the defence of Port Arthur. Port Arthur? I knew nothing whatever about Port Arthur!

"What's the matter with you?" asked the old general. "Where have your brains gone?"

They certainly were not bothering themselves about Port Arthur. Martynov gave me another five days in which to prepare the subject. When I appeared before him again at the end of that time my answers were satisfactory. And that evening I took my wife to Parnassus where Pegasus with his empty belly pranced and pawed.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BEGINNINGS OF SOVIET DIPLOMACY

ABOUT this time, Iouréniev suggested that I might, while still doing my ordinary routine work, take a job on Chicherin's staff. The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs was a mighty worker, and had exhausted the efforts of half a dozen secretaries to keep up with him. As he slept very little and did his best work at night, he had to have a staff large enough to ensure an adquate number of persons being available at any moment of the twenty-four hours. There must always be two secretaries on duty.

The Secretariat of the Foreign Office was already, even at this early date, installed in the building it occupies to-day on the Koutznetsky-most. The personnel was in the care of an athletic Greek, as lovely to look at as Apollo, whose name was Kanghilari. I signed on for night duty. Chicherin was a man whose habits had to be respected. His richly furnished workroom was completely buried in books, newspapers and documents —as was his writing-table. Beside it stood a smaller table on which were a bottle of brandy and some glasses. When, towards dawn, he felt he could no longer keep awake, Georges Vassiliévitch used to refresh himself with a glass of Martel. The room next door was empty and opened into the ante-room which connected with the office occupied by the secretaries on duty. It was our job to open all letters, telegrams, messages, packages, reports, and to sort them by categories on a large table. We never disturbed Chicherin by taking his mail to him. What he wanted he came for himself. He used to mince into our room in his shirt-sleeves, wearing a large silk handkerchief round his neck and slippers on his feet adorned with metal buckles. These buckles which, for comfort's sake, he never troubled to fasten, made a clicking noise on the floor. I was never introduced formally to him, and the first time he saw me he did no more than glance inquisitively at me over his spectacles. Then he took a bundle of dispatches which was lying on my table, and trotted out again, his little pointed beard stuck out in front of him. The notes sent out by this Foreign Minister of the first Socialist Revolution, gave endless trouble to the chancelleries of Europe. He composed them himself with great care, aided by a disconcertingly retentive memory. He lived in a flat in the same building and was looked after by a Swiss family with the members of which he had long been on terms of friendship. His existence was of the simplest. He paid no attention to the ordinary decencies, to personal comfort, or to the normal conventions whether in the matter of dress or anything else. His favourite time for seeing foreign ambassadors was eleven o'clock at night. Monsieur de Brockdorff-Rantzau, the German Ambassador, his head held stiffly above a starched and shining collar, rubbed shoulders, at this unheard-of hour of the night in Georges Vassiliévitch's ante-room, with the plenipotentiaries of the Baltic and Asiatic States, which alone maintained representatives in Moscow at a time when the great Western Powers were still keeping us in quarantine. It was a real event when one day we received a telegram signed Poincaré—relating to an exchange of prisoners—and still more of an event when the U.S.S.R. was invited to take part in the Genoa Conference.

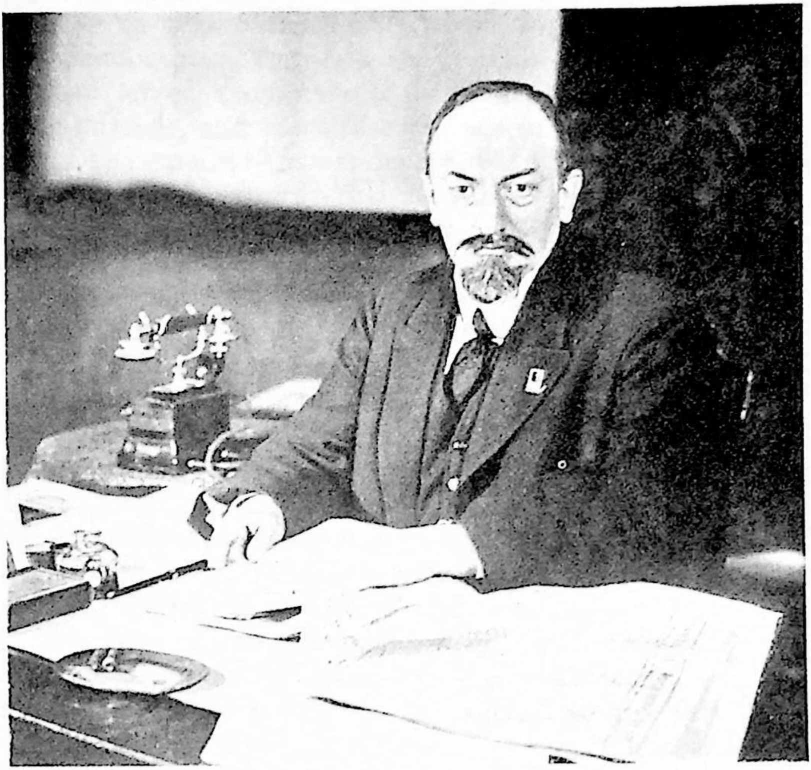
Once, in the early hours of the morning, I met there Djemal Pasha, the Turkish Grand Vizier, who could have had no idea that his days were numbered. A few days later, on his way home, he was assassinated at Tiflis.

French journalists and officers with Bolshevik leanings often came to see Chicherin between three and five a.m. One would frequently see in the ante-room the thin silhouette of M. René Machand, the correspondent of the *Figaro*, and the very military moustache of Lieutenant Pierre Pascal, ex-Attaché on the Imperial General Staff, who had become the secretary of the French Communist Group in Moscow.

At about five o'clock in the morning I would take the minister's Rolls-Royce and set off to the other end of Moscow to fetch his confidential typist. At six, Chicherin started dictating his mail to her. The letters were brought to my table. They had to be entered in the register, numbered, sent off and the copies filed. Georges Vassiliévitch used to come and help me affix the red seals to the secret documents intended for the heads of the Government, Lenin, Trotsky, and the members of the Central Committee. "Be careful!" he would mutter, "do be careful, you'll burn the paper." This done I had a quiet hour which I spent in reading the copies of the more important messages, the very superscriptions of which were enough to fill me with a sort of reverence: "The People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs to the President of the Council, Vladimir Illitch Lenin. . . ." I remember one scheme of his which never saw the light and was still-born. Like Lenin and Trotsky, Chicherin had no sympathy whatever for the League of Nations, which he regarded as a thinly disguised coalition of the victors against the vanquished. He proposed to set up, under the protection of the Soviets, a League of Peoples, in which the wronged, the oppressed, the exploited, and the members of ethnic minorities, would have been included on exactly the same footing as the dominant Powers, and where they would have been able to voice their grievances. In contrast to the League of Nations this League of Peoples would have become a centre of agitation for international justice between nations.

On one occasion Chicherin's typist, in a moment of carelessness caused by fatigue, committed an error which in the Moscow of to-day might well be regarded as an act of sabotage and counter-revolution. All messages to Lenin finished up with the conventional phrase: "Communist greetings". Instead of this, without intending any wrong, she put: "Capitalist greetings!" I noticed what she had done as I was going through the copies. The cyclist messenger had already left. I telephoned to the guard-room at the Kremlin, only to find to my horror that the packet had already gone through. A member of Lenin's staff told me that the dispatches were now lying on Vladimir Illitch's desk, and that nobody could touch them. . . . What would be the result of this unfortunate capitalist greeting? In fact, nothing happened, but the wretched typist, when I showed her the copy, she went quite green. Georges Vassiliévitch laughed into his beard. The Revolution, he thought, would not be deeply compromised. Nobody dreamed of laying against the typist a charge of intelligence, or even of lack of intelligence, with the enemy or with foreign spies. How times have changed!

Almost all the men who worked with Chicherin have now disappeared, either shot or imprisoned. As I call their names to mind I feel almost as though I were moving in a world of ghosts. There was Fechner, a young civil servant of pleasant manners and considerable ingenuity. We always said he'd never be anything but a big child—but that didn't prevent his being suspected of I don't know what, and thrown into prison in 1937, I suppose because he had had many years of service with Krestinsky. Many other names come back to my memory: Zuckerman, methodical worker and sincere Communist, who was,



[*Topical Press*

CHICHERIN

later, to be director of the Far Eastern Department, and eventually to be shot without trial on 16th December, 1937. Sandomirsky, formerly an anarchist who, at one time, had served a sentence of hard labour for revolutionary offences, and more recently was in charge of the Balkan Department. He was deported in 1935, and there is good reason to suppose that he too was shot. What happened to Pastoukhov and Kantorovitch, I don't know, though I assume the worst. Ganetsky, a veteran of the Social Democratic movement, having started in diplomacy, was transferred to the Government Department in charge of circuses and music halls. He was imprisoned in 1937.

And last but not least, there was Karakhan, who was among those shot on the 16th of December, 1937.

Léon Mikhailovitch Karakhan used to turn up at the office about eleven o'clock each morning, freshly shaved, impeccably dressed, complete with gloves and polished eyeglasses, looking, in his well-fitting suit, like a matinée idol. He was a charming creature, with engaging manners and a good share of Oriental good looks; his fair skin showed to advantage in contrast to the little pointed black beard which he wore. We gave him the tribute of our unstinted admiration, amazed, as we were, that humanity could produce such perfection. He had a purity of profile such as is seen, as a rule, only on ancient coins; he carried himself well, had a gay temperament and was a master of persuasive speech. He was a born optimist, a conscientious worker, simple in his dealings with others, and always ready to give a helping hand to his younger colleagues. No one could have been better suited by nature for a brilliant diplomatic career, nor more ideally equipped for training diplomats. In fact, Karakhan, after service his apprenticeship at the Brest-Litovsk negotiations, was sent as Soviet representative to

Pekin where he had the job of re-opening diplomatic relations with China. Later he was appointed to Ankara where he was accredited to Mustapha Kemal's Government—a confidential mission of the highest importance. His signature appears on many treaties concluded by the U.S.S.R. Nobody knows why he was shot. The execution took place in conditions of the utmost secrecy, and his memory was brutally blackened during the trial of the Twenty-one, which followed. His success with women was considerable, and I have an idea that, in this field, he got on the wrong side of the Secretary-General, who forgets nothing and never forgives a slight. I can't help thinking that some trivial matter of this sort contributed to his fall, though there were other, and more important reasons, too, chief of which was his high value as an individual and his immense experience.

On the eve of the Genoa Conference I made my first acquaintance with Rakovsky, who was then in the prime of life, always smiling, and in touch with everything that was going on, and with Beksadian, president of the Council of People's Commissars of Armenia. Both men accompanied Chicherin to Genoa and to Rapallo. Beksadian was the unfortunate Soviet ambassador at Budapest who disappeared in prison at the end of last year.

The prospect of going to Genoa kept every junior member of the staff, both men and women, wide awake. Georges Vassiliévitch, driven frantic by an endless flow of tiresome requests, rushed into my room one night, saying:

"Put up a notice in the ante-room forbidding anyone to mention the Genoa Conference!"

In high good humour, I pretended to take the chief's outburst of temper seriously, and his orders were carried out to the letter. Was I not a soldier? I knew how to draft instructions, and, savouring in advance the surprise of my colleagues, I affixed the following to the notice-board:

THE PEOPLE'S COMMISSAR HAS GIVEN ORDERS THAT NOBODY IS TO SPEAK TO HIM OF THE GENOA CONFERENCE.

"Ah," said Karakhan an hour later with a smile, "that will greatly simplify my task."

Chicherin looked at my notice over his spectacles with a vague expression on his face, and it remained in position for several days. But an English journalist took the joke seriously, and wrote home to the effect that such was the emotion produced by the prospect of a reconciliation with the Capitalist countries that the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs was being literally besieged by persons of importance.

While our diplomats were away negotiating with the Powers of Europe, I put in a period of practical work with the War College at Khodynka Camp near Moscow. We spent our time making topographical surveys, going route marches, engaging in tactical exercises, and sleeping under canvas.

When I returned from Khodynka, Iouréniev met me in the street as I was dismounting from my horse with my surveys, my maps, and my topographical instruments.

"I want you," he said. "I have just been appointed to Riga, and I'm going to take you with me. Are you agreeable? Good! Be ready to start to-morrow evening."

I was given the post of Second Secretary of Legation in Latvia and actually took train to Riga the following night.

Russia was slowly recovering from her wounds. Famine was still rife in certain parts of the country, and everywhere there was a shortage of food and much poverty. I had never yet been abroad. I had never before seen a city so clean, so well kept, so comfortable, as Riga, with its attractive shop windows, its neatly paved streets, its cottages, and its bright colours. The Legation was equipped with mirrors and expensive furniture—a regular bourgeois interior! The first morning we were brought a breakfast such as we had never dreamed of. I tasted the first cup of *café au lait* that I was to enjoy as a diplomat with mixed feelings, a little worried, a little sad. A few days later, I went for a walk in the public gardens wearing my Soviet badge in my buttonhole. I had some angry words with an old Russian officer, who turned away after a few rude and aggressive remarks.

Iouréniev, informed of the incident, said:

"You'd better not wear that badge. If you got your neck broken all my friendship for you would not enable me to bring you to life again, and, with the best will in the world, I couldn't regard the occurrence as constituting a *casus belli*, but it might put us in a very awkward position." I protested, but I had to obey orders.

The First Secretary, Sémachko, had had his hour of glory in 1917. He was serving at that time as a non-commissioned officer, and, during the revolutionary outbreaks of July, had led a machine-gun battalion into the streets with the object of seizing power, though the Central Bolshevik Committee had urged caution. . . . Later on he showed the same resistance to discipline, and ended as a fugitive in South America.

Our Government had established a rest-house for senior officials at Majorenhof, quite close to Riga—for it had realised that no real rest and quiet was possible on Russian territory. . . . The Lettish police kept a very strict eye on this place where Commissars, journalists and members of the Central Committee would often spend the evening singing the *Internationale* in chorus. Like all policemen they had a nose for plots, and were convinced that this singing was evidence of an extremely dangerous conspiracy. We at the Legation were constantly being bombarded with questions on the subject.

At Majorenhof I met Stiéklov, the editor of *Izvestia* and future biographer of Bakunin (what, I wonder, has become of him?), Soukhanov, one of the Menshevik leaders of the first Petrograd Soviet in 1917, an historian of parts who was sentenced in 1931 to ten years' imprisonment, Litvinov, a very old friend of Iouréniev's, who was passing through with his family, and Fayçoulla Khodjaev, whom I had last seen wearing a turban and with a striped *khalat* thrown over his uniform. He accompanied me on a trip to the seaside in a raglan coat and felt hat, his complexion yellower than ever, and his head stuffed with projects for the reorganisation of Central Asia.

I returned to Moscow on the eve of the IVth Congress of the Communist International, accompanied in the diplomatic coach by several foreign delegates: Clara Zetkin, still full of fight though she was now an old woman; Bohumir Sméral, a fat man in spectacles, the greatest opportunist of all the Communist politicians in the world and now representing the Czech Communist Party; the Pole Valetsky; and the Hungarian professor Varga. Finally, there was Boris Souvarin, who had come on behalf of the French Communist Party. These foreign delegates often showed the most revolting lack of consideration in their dealings with us. Varga and Valetsky maintained that they had a right to a private carriage, though the train was so full that it was obviously impossible for me to get them one, and I was myself travelling with a political refugee from some Baltic country, where he had been condemned to death, concealed in my coupé. Souvarin supported me whole-heartedly in the discussion that followed. The two members of the executive threatened to complain of me in high quarters, and did in fact do so when we arrived, conduct which, I must say, seemed to me rather odd. Surely an old revolutionary like Valetsky ought to have been contented with a half-share of a first-class sleeper—and so ought an ex-member of the former Red Government of Hungary like Varga. The little luxuries of power soon go to men's heads.

A few days after my return to the Academy, the Political Commissar of the School, Mouklévitch, summoned me to his office. The complaint of the two members of the executive was lying on his table, and he reprimanded me for having been guilty of a lack of courtesy towards them. I called on Souvarin as a witness to my version of the incident. He defended me in a strongly worded letter, in the course of which he had a good many unflattering things to say of our colleagues. Mouklévitch quietly sat on the complaint. We became great friends with Boris Souvarin who at that time was a member of the bureau of the Komintern, and paid several visits to him in his modest room at the Lux-Hotel, which was the headquarters of the delegates of the International. I take this opportunity of saluting the memory of Mouklévitch, who was one of our really great soldiers, and is probably no longer alive; fat and well-tended, with a puffy face, this old Bolshevik had all the quiet confidence and appearance of a born leader. At one time, like Dybenko, a simple sailor, he rose to be commander of the Republican fleet, was a member of the Revolutionary Council, and Assistant People's Commissar for War, was in charge of War Industries and Naval Construction, and disappeared suddenly in 1937. He was probably shot. He was the kind of man whom Stalin does not willingly let live, even behind bars. At one period in 1923 Mouklévitch had belonged to the Opposition.

[*Wide World*

M. LITVINOV

SOKOLNIKOV KRESTINSKY

CHAPTER XIV

FIRST MUTTERINGS OF THE STORM

BETWEEN 1921 and 1924 the evolution of opinion in Moscow was very rapid. The Revolution had been through some bad times and suffered several bad shocks, but it had never doubted its own strength. Its very internal squabbles had been conducted in an atmosphere of faith. In 1921, at the time of the Kronstadt rising, the Republic was within measurable distance of destruction. A little earlier, the discussion of the Trades Unions question had brought the Party face to face with the most serious problems, had made it realise that it must now choose definitely the lines along which policy must develop. The difficulties had been shelved rather than solved. And now the new economic policy inaugurated by Lenin was beginning to show fruit. The conditions of living had improved; food was better and more plentiful; there was, throughout the country, an undeniable sense of lessened tension; the standard of production everywhere was rising. But money had reappeared; money had once more become the touchstone of social life.

Now, we had all grown up in the belief that we had done with money once and for all. It had never occurred to us young Communists that the suppression of currency was not so much the expression of a Socialist ideal, as an expedient due to devaluation and to the impossibility of permitting freedom of exchange where goods were concerned, owing to the excessively bad quality of what was being produced. The real truth was that it was both—an expedient and a deliberate policy devised by the best economists of the Party, Lenin, Bukharin and

Preobrajensky, and intended by them to be a stage in the development of the Socialist experiment. Inflation had depreciated the value of paper money to such an extent that steps had had to be taken to provide certain services—railway-travel, trams, postal delivery, theatrical entertainment and medical supervision—free. . . . A pocket handkerchief was worth more than a banknote dotted with an impressive array of zeros. No Soviet notes had ever been issued, and those in use dated from the time of Kerensky's Government. The State Printing House no longer took the trouble to number them or to issue them separately. One got them in huge sheets, like postage stamps, and I have more than once seen these sheets used as packing paper or as a substitute for wall-paper in the cottages of peasants. A further difficulty arose from the fact that there would soon be a shortage of paper—even for the purposes of inflation!

And now, under this new arrangement, revived freedom of trade and the payment of taxes in kind—both measures designed to bring about a degree of reconciliation with the peasants—were going to restore to money a definite value. Everything, from now on, had to be paid for. The handsome winter turn-outs, so well beloved of the Muscovite heart, began to make their appearance once more on the streets—elegant sledges drawn by thoroughbred horses—but they were beyond the reach of most of us. Several restaurants opened, and, as we walked down the streets, we could hear the blare of their orchestras. We had to pay for baths, pay for a moment's amusement, pay for the smallest ration of food. The men of the Revolution, young and old, made the sudden discovery that they had no money. It had never occurred to any of them to bother about making it. A few lucky devils had an extra pair of boots, and that was about all. Official Communists were paid a salary of about 200 roubles a month, that is to say the wage of a skilled workman. But the workman was better off, because he could sell things in the open market, a means of making money which was denied to us. If money were to reappear, wouldn't rich people reappear too? Weren't we on the slippery slope that led back to Capitalism? We put the question to ourselves with feelings of anxiety.

Dressed in the uniform of the Military Academy, decorated with Orders won at the cost of their blood, the heroes of the Civil War discovered in their wanderings about Moscow that they had nothing, that everything was beyond their reach, that the profiteers could snap their fingers at them with impunity; and they began to wonder whether they had fought in vain. Our confidence in the leaders of the Party, in Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Zinoviev, made it possible for us, however, to stifle these doubts. *They* knew where they were going and whither they were leading us—or so we argued. They, surely, would never admit defeat; they, certainly, would never betray us.

I found the Headquarters Academy riddled with new preoccupations and in the throes of a complicated mood of bitter grievance. The Civil War was over; our seniors had finished their courses of study. What, now, was to become of them? Every important post was occupied by generals of the old régime, the professional soldiers who had rallied to the Party and helped it to win the war. Trotsky's policy towards them had contributed to the victory of the Revolution. But now? The War College began to talk of the necessity of reorganisation, of injecting new blood into the senior ranks, of preparing for the next war in terms of the military doctrine of Marxism—of which Toukhatchevsky had become the unexpected theorist—and the general attitude was made vocal in the simple slogan: "Make room for the young Red generals!" To-morrow the Dybenkos, the Ventsovs, the Fedkos, the

Ouritskys, the Gays, would have matriculated. The old generals calmly proposed to relegate them, for the time being, to the lower commands. The Dybenkos and the Gays, after having led armies on active service, were to find themselves in charge of battalions and companies! The situation gave rise to a comic song. Ambition, justifiable perhaps, but still ambition, concern for personal success—why not call it by its proper name, and simply say "pushfulness"—was to be an element, on equal terms with the desire to stabilise the Revolution, in the process of building the army anew from top to bottom.

The political problem was further complicated by the fact that the president of the Revolutionary War Council, the one member of the Party who had gained most glory by the recent victories, and was the most admired for the energy that he had displayed on the various fronts, Trotsky, seemed to consider that the old professionals had still a part to play in events. The former generals, Lebediev, Brussilov, Novitsky, Vatsetis, Kaménev, were still collaborating with him, and although the War Council was composed of proved revolutionaries, we began to feel frightened of the influence wielded by this over-decorated staff. A sort of underground opposition to Trotsky, taking advantage of the state of feeling then prevalent, began to show its head both in the Party and in the Army. Its rallying points were Stalin and Voroshilov. It set its face against the trust reposed in the "professionals", and also against the policy of centralised command. It had even wrecked certain strategic plans.

Naturally, the College was divided on these various questions. A sort of coterie came into being, led by an old Bolshevik—old, merely in terma of his political career, for he was under thirty—a man decorated with the Order of the Red Flag, full of energy, and gifted with a power of speech, an almost demagogic gift of oratory. He fomented the existing discord with considerable skill. In his attempts to reform the administration of the Communist "cell", this man, Kroutchinsky by name, was supported by most of the old guard—Dybenko, Ouritsky, and Fedko—and opposed by a few of the younger men, myself included, who had had enough of quarrels and personalities. We managed to get his candidature defeated, despite a number of open threats. The newly elected board tried to get hold of Kroutchinsky by co-option, but after a while he disappeared, "withdrawn from circulation" by the Cheka. We found out that he was nothing but a suspected adventurer. His long membership of the Party was just a piece of bluff, and he was no more entitled to the glory of his exploits than he was to the decorations which he sported without any right. I had guessed as much, and what happened served to increase my self-confidence.

The Central Committee no doubt remembered the very odd way in which the pupils of the College had voted during the debate on the Trades Unions question, when the majority of us had declared for the working-class opposition, that is to say for the extreme Left of the Party, against Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin and Tomsky. More or less well informed about the state of mind prevalent in our ranks, the Central Committee decided that the College must be subjected to a "purge". At this time it was under the directorship of a former general and a former colonel of the Imperial Army, Lebediev and Afanassiev. The purge descended on our heads like a cloudburst. It was administered relentlessly by a commission enjoying full powers and acting in secret. Among its members were Boubnov, who later became People's Commissar for education, and Skliansky, Trotsky's assistant, who died three years afterwards in Chicago. It sentenced men to exclusion from the Party and from the College, or both together, giving any reason that seemed good to it, or often giving none at all. In this way it threw into the street, without employment and with their reputations compromised, a number of officers who had done splendid work at the front and had just finished their military studies. Several of these poor wretches committed suicide. My friend Gaevsky, who, to my knowledge, had won a reputation for utter fearlessness under fire, was excluded from the College. He was a tall, thin, jolly fellow, but when next I saw him he was a broken man in a state of indignation and despair. We met in one of the corridors quite close to the director's office. Gaevsky was carrying a paper to which was attached something that glittered. He said bitterly: "If I am unworthy to be a member of the College I don't know why I was given the Order of the Red Flag in the field—they can have it back!" He was reinstated, for the error of judgment had been too flagrant. He was to become a well-known organiser of industry before being charged with "terrorism" in 1936, and branded with the name of an "enemy of the people". . . . Another of my friends, Itskovsky, who, in the old days, had done time as a political prisoner, and had fought with Piatakov in Kiev during the early days of the Revolution, was excluded on the motion of Boubnov, with whom he had shared a mattress in a Ukrainian prison, and whose colleague he had been on one of the local governments. Meeting Boubnov one day, he refused to take his hand, but with a bitter laugh drew away from him as from some social outcast. I can see him now, cheerful as ever, when things were going wrong, saying with a broad smile that there was worse to come. . . . Whence had he derived that happy temperament? When the Revolution broke out in February 1917, he had been released from gaol where, for five years, he had been living in solitary confinement, loaded with chains. I imagine that he had trained himself to grin and bear in circumstances which would have broken the spirit of most men. The commission reinstated him in the College. He disappeared in 1935, accused of Trotskyism. Boubnov followed him in 1937.

My wife, overcome with despair, told me that I too had been sentenced to exclusion from the College. It meant the break-up of our life, the destruction of everything for which we had lived, ruin and desolation. The commission had examined my case in my absence, and all I knew was that I had been dismissed—a few months before receiving promotion to senior rank—on the grounds that "I was too young and too delicate". (My malaria was, I must admit, a great handicap.) I decided to appeal to the Central Committee.

Molotov, the secretary of the Central Committee, was available for interviews any day. . . . I went to a two-storied, yellow-painted house in the Rue Vosdvijenka, not far from the Kremlin. I had merely to show my Party card at the door. "First room on the right," I was told. The room was huge, badly kept, and poorly furnished. There was a table in the middle surrounded with chairs. Several people were waiting, seated near the door. At the far end, in front of the window, was a second, smaller table, covered with papers and telephones, at which stood Molotov in conversation with a workman. . . .

When my turn came, Molotov listened to me, made one or two notes, asked a few questions, and said: "Right, I'll do what I can."

Four days later my sentence of exclusion from the College was reversed. The authorities made a good many mistakes in those days, but they were quickly repaired. The democratic spirit of the Party was made operative by means of direct contact between members and officials, and was exemplified in a simplicity of manners which at times approximated to the crude.

About this time I met a number of men whose future careers are not without interest. Michael Ostrovsky, until recently Political Commissar with Boudienny's army, a personal friend of Voroshilov's, and involved with Stalin in the conspiracy against Trotsky, had just been appointed Assistant Commissar, under Mouklévitch, at the College. His second-in-command was a young Jew, twice decorated, of proved valour as a soldier, and a painter and caricaturist of talent, whose name was Biélotsky. Biélotsky was determined never to become a high official, but to remain in contact with the masses. He devoted his life, later, to working for the Rural Organisations of the Party as a secretary of local committees. For eight years he laboured as an organiser in the Kirghiz Republic. He was one of those men who will adopt a country with passion and devote himself entirely to its interests. He knew every mile and every detail of the Kirghiz countryside. He became secretary of the Central Committee for Kirghizistan, that is to say the *de facto* ruler of this autonomous republic, and met his end in 1937 when he was denounced as "an enemy of the people".

I acted as guide to Newbold, the English Communist M.P., when he visited Moscow. He was a great, hulking, untidy sort of a chap with whom we used to discuss revolutionary possibilities in the United Kingdom. Since those days Newbold has disappeared from the political scene.

I attended, with a feeling of some curiosity, the course of lectures in strategy given by "Comrade" Slastchev, an elderly officer with a scarlet face, a large, red nose, and hair cut stiffly *en brosse*, who used always to appear in a green tunic from which the epaulettes had been removed. We gave him the title "comrade" out of respect for the authorities who had set him to lecture to us, but no one was particularly sorry to learn that a young Communist, meeting him one day in the street, had shot him down with his revolver. Slastchev always referred to himself as "Slastchev of the Crimea", having been responsible for erecting a series of impregnable defences at the neck of the peninsula—which the Red battalions captured without firing a shot! . . . He had been with Baron Wrangel, by whom he was appointed to the command of the White Army of the Crimea. At Djankoy he won considerable notoriety by hanging all the members of an organisation of young Communists—workmen, students, boys and girls, alike. After that he was known all over Russia as Slastchev the Hangman until the day when, having betrayed Wrangel at Constantinople, he came over to our side, carrying with him a good many documents relating to the White forces.

One day, in the middle of his lecture, one of the class said:

"I beg your pardon, Comrade Professor, but I was at the battle of Perekop, and I can assure you that we never had that number of effectives."

"Quite likely," answered the ex-hangman politely. "I have not been through all the evidence—and the Soviet troops made up in valour for what they lacked in numbers."

Slastchev was killed by the brother of one of his victims.

In 1922 the U.S.S.R. convoked in Moscow a disarmament conference at which representatives of Poland and of the Baltic States were present. The Foreign Office detailed me to act as secretary. Chicherin did not appear, and, so far as I remember, Litvinov's visits to the conference room were few and far between. The chairman was Victor Kopp, a Soviet diplomat, who has been dead now for some years, and against whom quite recently a series of posthumous charges of high treason were formulated before the Military Tribunal.

Poland, represented by Prince Radziwill and Monsieur Lukasiewicz, managed to persuade Finland, Latvia, and Esthonia to follow her example and send delegates. Lithuania, though since the Vilna affair she had severed diplomatic relations with Warsaw, seemed anxious to achieve a *rapprochement* with us. But even at the conference table her representatives sat apart. They included a general whose uniform, I must say, was very handsome and resplendent, with more crosses, stars and ribbons than that of the most famous of the victorious leaders in the Great War. Very tall and proportionately stout, General Radus-Sincovitchus stood for me as the true original of all those musical-comedy commanders who, I had been pleased to think, no longer existed. He figured in an episode which became, for us Communists, a matter of heated discussion. The assembled delegates were awaiting the arrival of the principal Soviet representatives. A double door was flung open and General Novitsky tripped in, wearing a uniform that could boast neither decorations nor badges of rank, a faded tunic, and clumsy great boots. Novitsky, one of the professors at the College for whom we felt a real respect, was small and rather thin. He bowed to the room generally, and suddenly found himself face to face with the imposing figure of Radus-Sincovitchus. To our consternation the two men embraced like long-lost brothers. Radus-Sincovitchus, at a time when he was known only as Rada-Sincovitch, had been a member of the War College before the Revolution as a commissioned officer in the army of the Tsar. As such he had been Novitsky's brother in arms. But how could a leader of the Red Army of

Workmen and Peasants show such signs of affection for a military officer in the service of a state which, however mildly, was still Capitalist? Ought he not to have ignored all memory of the past and concentrated solely on the problem of disarmament? We laughed a good deal at our more uncompromising companions who expressed their disapproval in no uncertain tones, though even they did not go so far as to accuse dear old Novitsky of wishing to dismember the Soviet Republic!

Nothing much came of the conference. But it was a useful means of bringing us into closer contact with our neighbours.

CHAPTER XV

MAN IS BORN TO SORROW

MY wife was preparing to join me in Riga when I was ordered back to Moscow. Her mother's illness had kept her at home, and the situation was further complicated by my exclusion from the War College. Term was just about to begin. I took leave of Iouréniev, and for the next few weeks was able to enjoy a quiet family existence. We lived at the Hotel Livadia which was reserved for the use of the College students. My mother-in-law shared our room, which was large enough for us to be able to arrange a screened-off corner for her private use. The rations issued by the military authorities would have been quite sufficient if only they had been allotted in a rational manner. We had the right to seven kilos of meat a month, but this quantity was delivered in bulk. Since it was impossible to keep such an amount, whether cooked or raw, in an edible condition, we used to gorge ourselves sick for a week and do without for the rest of the time. The quartermaster's store was short of refrigerating plant and transport; besides, it was constantly waging war with other State departments, and had to take what it could when it could, at the cost of ignoring convenience and even the dictates of ordinary common sense.

In a very short time Olga Fédorovna found herself pregnant, and then, suddenly, her health gave way. Our powers of resistance had got into the habit of dealing with unforeseen circumstances, but the effects of malaria, under-nourishment, exhaustion and emotional excitement had contributed to tax my wife's youth more than we suspected at the time. Her condition caused her acute discomfort. She found it almost impossible to take any food. She had periods of violent nausea and had to keep to her bed. A doctor whom we consulted advised abortion. A terrible expression came into her face when she heard him pronounce the word. We wanted a child. She decided, therefore, to try another doctor who enjoyed a high reputation, Professor Kholmogorov. She went to see him accompanied by her mother. I had been out on a tactical exercise, and when I came back I found her once more in bed with a high colour and very bright eyes. I was so anxious that I dared not ask her what had happened and spoke of other things in a tone of carefully assumed indifference, pretending that I was not thinking of our particular trouble.

"Don't you want to know what he said?" she asked me reproachfully.

The doctor, it seemed, was willing that she should continue pregnant, had prescribed a diet, and promised that her condition would improve. We were going to be able to have a child after all! In the period that followed the pregnancy did, in fact, seem to become more normal, though Olga remained very weak and grew thinner. We decided that she had better go home to her father in the country and not come back to Moscow until ten days before the date of her delivery. Her father, a retired clerk, lived in a village of the Tambov province called Rasskasovo, where there was plenty of vegetables, milk and white bread. Olga would be assured of quiet, fresh air, and good food. The summer months in that gentle, flat countryside are mild. I was delighted at the idea of sparing my wife the exhausting life of the capital, and set myself to work with a good will for my examinations.

I had to pass simultaneously those of the College and of the Faculty of Oriental Languages. Since 1921, I had given up my study of Hindustani and concentrated on a more complete mastery of Persian. The musical tongue of Saadi and Firdausi appealed very forcibly to many of us. The old scholar Mirza Djahar Khan, our professor, finding me so keen, offered to give me special tuition without any extra charge. Two of my class-mates, Slavoutsky and Pastoukhov, and I were soon able to take notes in Persian on the subject of the history of Iran, which we studied in the original language.

In the course of the last two years, ideas and manners in Moscow had undergone a complete change. I was profoundly influenced by these changes, and my views had altered accordingly. My idea in taking up the study of Oriental languages had been to devote myself later to Communist propaganda in the East. Was not the revolutionary spirit coming to a head both in Persia and in Afghanistan? I imagined myself travelling through those countries disguised as a merchant though really acting as an agent of the Third International.

The tempo of events was slackening. The Soviet Republic was growing used to the idea of living on neighbourly terms with countries so far untouched by revolution. Instead of preparing secret revolutionary activities fraught with peril and interest, I found myself working for a career in the Consular Service. I was to be, not an agitator and an organiser of insurrection, but a State official. The Foreign Office was keeping open for me a job as Consul in Persia. . . . It was agreed that I should shortly leave for that country with my wife and child.

On the 10th July (1923) I passed the last examination in Persian with an honourable mention. I was now the proud possessor of a first-class degree. My wife's pregnancy was drawing to its close, and I expected when I got home to find a letter announcing her immediate return, for we had set our hearts on the child being born in one of the good Moscow maternity homes. A telegram was waiting for me:

"Twin boys. Olga doing well. Father."

The twins must have been born prematurely. My delight was tinged with anxiety. Two days passed. On the 12th July the hotel porter handed me another telegram which contained two words only:

"Olga dead."

Mechanically I climbed to my fifth floor, and sat down on the divan, twisting in my hands that odd strip of paper, reading and re-reading the incredible words that it contained. Everything round me was in its customary place: Olga's clothes were hanging on the pegs, her glass and toothbrush were in their usual place on the washstand. I could not understand. I was too young. Never before had irreparable disaster struck me like this in the face. I was familiar with death on the battlefield, but the death of the person dearest to me in all the world, of someone so young, so beautiful, and in the act of giving life—that was more than I could take in. I was stunned: my throat and my eyes were dry. The disaster had not as yet come home to me. Some friends came in, talked to me, sat beside me—and no doubt I gave them rational answers. The first thing to be done was to get away as soon as possible. . . . The formalities took three days—getting leave, procuring a military railway pass, furnishing myself with the necessary papers. During all that time I have no idea what went on in my head, I know only that I refused firmly to believe that Olga was dead. It must be a mistake, a nightmare from which I should soon awake, since everything went on as though no tragedy had happened, and since I was so soon to see Olga again.

I made the journey in the same state of mind. It was stronger than any grief. At the little station I looked about for Olga. Of course she would be there just to assure me that what had happened was nothing but a bad dream. But she was not there, nor did I meet her on the footpath that led through cornfields to the house. Why not? Surely she knew what time the train arrived? Ah, of course, it was too soon after her lying-in for her to be up. The house had an air of melancholy, the trees surrounding it looked mournful in the sunshine. My father-in-law came out to meet me and pressed my hand in silence. I went in. Two bundles of white linen were lying on the bed, and a sound of weak whimpering came from them.

Were these two little scraps of complaining flesh all that remained to me of the being who had filled my universe? I looked at them with a sort of resentment. Was it for them that Olga had died—for them?

My father-in-law said very quietly: "She named them Alexandre and Boris. She held them in her arms. She was happy."

Olga had been on the point of leaving for Moscow when her pains began prematurely. She had had a terrible time. For two days her labours had continued. The second of the twins had had to be delivered with instruments. The doctor who had attended Olga seemed quite incapable of dealing with such a case. Exhausted by hæmorrhage, she had managed to struggle on for forty-eight hours.

"Where is she buried?"

It was only when I stood beside the newly dug grave in the village cemetery that I really understood. Her old father and I walked back through the fields. Death had become a reality. The two scraps of flesh and blood continued to whimper. Life too was real. My father-in-law leaned over them with his faded beard and gently gave them swabs soaked in milk to suck. The greedy little mouths ceased to complain. . . . A doctor came to see them.

"Born prematurely—too weak," he said. "They're only six days old but they've got gastritis already, both of 'em. No use making them suffer unnecessarily by trying to keep them alive. This one'll probably go any moment now; the other may hang on for a day or two."

Olga had died in order that they might live, and now they were to die too. As the thought occurred to me, the two little shapeless bundles became suddenly strangely dear to me, and I was seized with a determination to protect them and to save them for the sake of Olga, for the sake of life. I leaped into the saddle and galloped as far as the next village, where I found another doctor who was well spoken of.

"Come back with me, now at once!" I cried. "There are two children who've got to be saved!"

A bumpy little carriage took us back to Rasskasovo along sunny roads between woods and fields of corn.

The doctor was a long time over his examination.

"It looks as though my colleague was right: there's not much chance of saving them. Still, we can but try."

He prescribed a drug, prepared in infinitely small doses, which was to be given them once every hour. Their grandfather took charge of the situation. There was nobody else in the house. Meanwhile, I mounted my horse again and rode about the neighbouring hamlets hunting for a nurse. People looked at me suspiciously when I stopped them with the question—were there any young mothers about, and, if so, where? My uniform frightened them. I had to explain the situation to them. . . . When they had heard my story they at once became more friendly, and I was finally directed to an *isba.* I knocked at the door; I held forth at length, promising all my future food ration as a senior officer, as a Consul—promising anything they liked to ask. At this period it was not easy to find a peasant who would voluntarily take a job of work in the cities, and there was throughout the countryside a certain amount of hostility shown towards Communists. My offers were politely refused. Were the two little babies to die, then, just because I couldn't find them a nurse?

I was at the point of despair when I met a young mother who consented to look after them. Each time that I returned home I was torn with anxiety, and always surprised to hear that they were still alive, sickly, only just alive—but, still, alive. On the tenth day the doctor expressed a surprise greater even than my own.

"If it weren't for the fact that we no longer believe in miracles, I should say that this was one," he said. "Those kids will be bowled over by the slightest shock. There's nothing I can do for them. If you can get them to Moscow and find special treatment for them, they may survive. But the risks of a journey are immense."

They might be, but I decided to take them. We were driven to the station in a light trap. The nurse of course took her own child as well, so there I was, in charge of three new-born babies. There were no reserved carriages on this local line, and the train was packed with peasants, their sacks and their bundles. They spent their time smoking a rank, coarse-cut tobacco. Those lying in the upper berths let their great boots dangle over the edge just above the two fragile little heads wrapped in white linen. The atmosphere was thick with an animal stench, and the carriage was so full that it was impossible to move. Even the corridor was crowded. Travelling under these conditions, we took thirty-six hours to reach our destination. The twins kept up a ceaseless whimper, but at least they were alive—yes, they were alive, and I began to believe in their future. Olga's sacrifice had not been in vain since they still lived.

In Moscow it was raining. I left the nurse and the three babies in a waiting-room chock-full of poor peasants and ran to the headquarters of the Public Health Department. An official informed me that the crèche for new-born children was full up. Nothing could be done. I hastened to the Foreign Office. Léon Mikhailovitch Karakhan received me in his office with open arms.

"We're thinking of sending you as Consul to the Khan of Makine. He is, you know, a Persian feudal chieftain in insurrection against the Shah, a sort of bearded despot. D'you think you're up to dealing with his tricks?"

Karakhan clearly saw from my expression that I had not come to ask him for a better job in the Service.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

As soon as he had heard my story, he took the necessary steps with the Public Health people. They told him over the telephone that they'd find room somewhere—that I need only take my children to the Institute. The nurse and I bundled into an open carriage—nothing else was available—one of those old, high, two-wheeled conveyances that had somehow come through the disasters of the last few years, and, with the rain still pouring down on us, wrapping the babies in my uniform great-coat, we were driven to the Crèche for New-Born Children, the head of which was Dr. Spéransky. I had to fetch the great man from his office before I could prevail on the officials to admit us and cut short the formalities. . . . Once inside the building, as soon as a nurse had put my two bundles—now frighteningly quiet—on a padded table in the entrance hall, everything changed. One of the two, Boris, had a little froth showing at his lips. Obviously, he was at his last gasp. A woman doctor immediately prescribed artificial respiration. He was literally on the point of death. Some hours later, my two sons, lying in an incubator, were on the high road to safety. They remained delicate, but gave evidence of considerable powers of resistance. To-day they are fifteen years old, and I have reason to suppose that they'll need those powers more than ever!

The matriculation of my "year" was marked by a party at which the stars of the Moscow Ballet came and danced on the platform in the great hall of the War College. There were speeches. . . . The Central Committee distributed twenty places at its new Rest House at Marino among the leaving cadets. One of them was allotted to me, and I was glad of the opportunity for a change of air. My room at the Hotel Livadia had become insupportable.

Marino is a huge estate, once the property of a prince, the sort of feudal domain which Turgéniev so well described. Prince Bariatinsky, the conqueror of the Caucasus, to whom it had belonged, had once lodged there the Imam (Prince of the Church) Chamyl, the hero of the Caucasian struggle for independence, whom he had taken prisoner. The palace stood in a park some of the vistas of which had been modelled on those of Versailles. The Central Committee's instructions to its director, Strijac, were that their guests should be made as comfortable as possible and given, above all, plenty of good and varied food. Strijac carried out their orders, but only by dint of over-spending his allowance, as a result of which he fell fnto disfavour and finally committed suicide.

I was dazzled by so much comfort and splendour. The rooms were furnished in rare woods, gold-tinted Carelian birch and tropical mahogany. When I first entered the great dining-hall with its crystal chandeliers, its side-tables loaded with fruits, and its sound of talk and happy laughter, I could think only of the hardships through which we had passed during the preceding years. If a little of that fruit had been available for Olga Fédorovna, mightn't she still have been alive? And she wasn't the only one. Thousands of other women had died, like her, from sheer exhaustion. My personal tragedy counted as nothing in the great tragedy of my country. . . . As I remembered the rations we had drawn as much-envied students of the War College, the wretched meals with which, as a newly married couple, we had had to be content, the taste of all this fine food provided by the Central Committee turned bitter in my mouth. I couldn't eat it: I pushed away my plate. I felt for the handsome dining-hall a sort of morbid hatred. I asked to be allowed to take my meals in my own room, and was happy only when surrounded by books and old trees.

THIRD PART

"Of all forms of wealth a State can possess, the lives of its citizens are the greatest. . . ."

(Stalin, in a speech addressed to
the last Congress of the Russian Communist Party)

CHAPTER XVI

PERSIA WILL NEVER BE A REPUBLIC . . .

IN October 1923, Moscow was in the throes of violent excitement. I kept in touch with the College until I should know what was to happen to me—and began to be sorry that I had not studied German instead of Persian. We were preparing to back up the German revolution, every detail of which had been organised by the Communist International under the direction of Zinoviev. Radek gave a series of lectures on the subject. He spoke to packed benches, and we could feel that his whole life was dominated by the anticipation of what was to happen. His dialectic initiated us into the secrets of the economics, history, psychology and opposed ideologies of the German people, one section of which, the workers, was about to impose its will on the other for the salvation of the country and the progress of humanity. . . . Radek was, as ever, eloquent, and, as ever, he spoke in the indescribable accent which we had learned to associate with him; but intelligence and fire were the dominant elements in him. He never uttered a useless or empty phrase, never let the attention of his hearers droop, was always at grips with reality, which he held, as it were, in the talons of his logic. A slender young woman with auburn curls and the regular features of a Minerva without her helmet, who stood leaning against the frame of the door, seemed to be drinking in his words. This was his future wife, Larissa Reisner, who had been a fighting soldier in one of the first Red battalions of the Volga at nineteen, and was now a writer of vigorous and visionary articles. A few days later she was to be following, hour by hour, the street fighting in Hamburg, an experience out of which she later made a moving book. Zinoviev wrote a memorable essay in the *Pravda*, defining in advance, the foreign policy which would be pursued by the German Soviet Republic. . . . I had a profound belief in him, but I couldn't help thinking that he was, perhaps, counting his chickens before they were hatched.

The Foreign Office had put me at the disposal of Choumiatsky, who had just been appointed ambassador to Persia, and he sent for me. For two years I was to be the colleague of this remarkable man. An old militant Socialist, organiser of a rising and of a Soviet at Krasnoyarsk in Eastern Siberia during the revolution of 1905, and an erudite student of Marx, he was a Jew about forty years of age, with a massive face, wavy hair, and a deep, commanding voice. Gifted with astounding energy, quite tireless, capable of working all day and all night, careful always to master every aspect of a situation, taking long views, eager and uncompromising, he was of the stuff of which great leaders are made. He was ambassador and Commercial Representative in Persia, and, later, became Director of Theatres and of the film industry in the U.S.S.R., a task almost beyond the powers of one man to accomplish, since it forced him into a position between the dangerous spontaneity of the arts and the capricious moods of artists on the one hand, and, on the other, the strictly limited and utilitarian intellectual prejudices of the governing bureaucracy. Choumiatsky finally gave way under the strain.

He told me that I had been appointed Consul-General of the U.S.S.R. in Ghilan, a district of Northern Persia lying along the Caspian Sea, and the economic centre of the whole country. The consulate was situated at Recht, the commercial capital. The port of Enzeli (now known, as Pahlavi) was, strategically and economically speaking, a place of the first importance for our influence in Persia.

The district is a very unhealthy one. There is a Persian proverb which says: *Morg miknakhi, Ghilan berow*—"If you want to die go to Ghilan."

I travelled with Choumiatsky and the staff of the Embassy. We had two unexpected companions as far as Baku, my College friend Jacques Blumkin, and the "imagist" poet Serge Essenin. They took to each other tremendously and never went to bed sober. Essenin made a painful impression on me. His youth had been early blighted, and he was now suffering from over-indulgence in alcohol and women and from the orgies to which he had treated himself after writing his poems, which remain some of the most moving in the Russian language. His face was pale and puffy, his eyes tired, his voice husky. He gave the impression of someone who had completely lost all moral sense. Blumkin, whose soldierly temperament always saved him from excess, had saddled himself with the job of "pulling him round". It was more than anyone could do! Essenin made one trip to Persia where he wrote some of his best verses, married Isadora Duncan, visited with her the United States and several European countries, and ended by hanging himself in a Leningrad hotel.

Choumiatsky insisted, for the sake of prestige, in crossing the Caspian Sea in a warship. The destroyer supplied to us for this purpose was an old vessel but looked well with its high, spare lines. There was a big sea running. Our steel ship literally "lay over" on the rollers. Every member of the Embassy staff was seasick. It took me several days to get over the experience. The solid ground of Persia seemed to me to be suffering from a rhythmical movement caused by invisible waves. The local authorities received us with much ceremony.

Brought face to face with realities, the Soviet Republic adopted towards Persia what was in fact a version of the traditional policy pursued by the old Tsarist Empire. The diplomats of the former régime had systematically prepared, chiefly by means of economic penetration, for the ultimate conquest of Persia, the government of which was forbidden by treaty to maintain any armed ships in the Caspian. Russia, on the other hand, kept two gunboats anchored at Enzeli. The only difference now was that the gunboats belonged to the Soviet. Russia was in control of the fishing-grounds of Ghilan and Mazanderan, and a Russian company held a concession which included the only road linking the north coast to Teheran, the capital. By a treaty signed in 1921 by Karakhan, the Soviets had agreed to the abolition of the system of capitulations, and had surrendered most of the advantages enjoyed by the former Imperial Government. But, to be frank, the clauses of this treaty were not always observed. The Soviet authorities administered the fishing rights, and the harbour, too, was in our hands. We were afraid that if we withdrew, the whole district would fall into the hands of our competitors, the English, who were extremely active and enjoyed the support of a party very influential in the councils of the powerful War Minister, Reza-Khan. This man, who was to become the absolute ruler of Persia, who was to assure it a position of real independence, and impose upon its people a number of reforms imitated from those applied by Mustapha Kemal in Turkey, had a profound knowledge of the Russians drawn from the period when, as a non-commissioned officer, he had served with a Cossack regiment stationed in Persia.

My Consulate-General was at Recht, 40 kilometres from Enzeli, where I maintained a Vice-Consul, and whither I went frequently myself. I arrived at Recht a few hours before the newly appointed British Consul, Mr. Trott, a fact which was to have a certain amount of importance later in its bearing on matters of diplomatic etiquette. My headquarters were situated in a comfortable and spacious building which had once been some merchant's house, with a large square courtyard. My staff consisted of two Russian secretaries, and two Persian clerks. All five of us were men between the ages of 23 and 25, and all unmarried, so that the consulate soon earned the nickname of "The Russian Monastery". Two old retainers, who had served the Consuls of the old régime, surrounded us with attentions, and never let us forget the ceremoniousness of Eastern life. Their clothes were terribly shabby, and this fact, living as they did in a country where dress plays a considerable part in social matters, gave them a jaundiced view of life. Now it so happened that my British colleague, whose house was quite close, had just fitted his servants out with brand-new uniforms. My two *goulams*, desolated by the news, respectfully laid their grievance before me. Were we going to allow the glorious flag of Russia to be humiliated in the eyes of all Persia? Their elbows were coming through their sleeves. My first act as Consul was to bring happiness to these excellent old men. I ordered for them new black liveries, adorned with red braid and silver buttons. I found a man who could make these latter specially for me and decorate them with the sickle and hammer. The same badge was mounted on their caps of the traditional local pattern. Their display of solemnity, braid, and silver, was far greater than that put forward by Mr. Trott's people, and so it was that we saved our national prestige—though I question whether our "foe" realised it!

My conscience as a Communist was very soon put to the test in the matter of certain landowners and merchants. When the capitulations had been in force, it had been the habit of the more astute among the rich

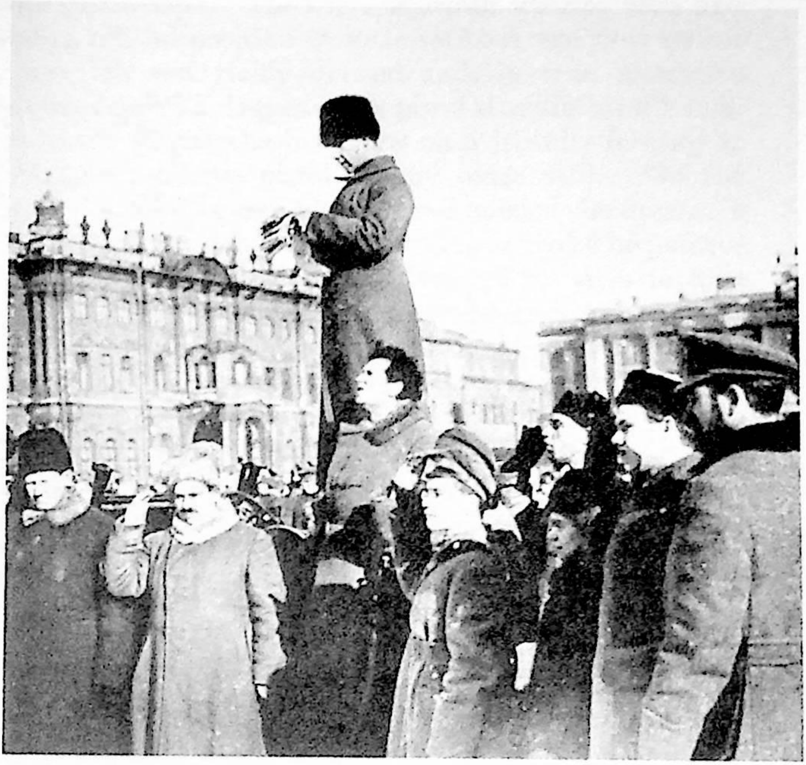
Persians to take out Russian nationality which would assure them consular protection. These men now came to me with a request to renew their passports. In my eyes they were just a lot of Capitalists to whom we owed no consideration whatever. But Choumiatsky's instructions were quite definite. The passports must be renewed; every protection must be afforded our fellow citizens in Persia, even though they *were* Capitalists. Through them we might be able greatly to extend our influence.

It was the thin end of the wedge. Part of my duty was to pay official visits to the military and civil governors, as well as to a number of local big-wigs. Among the latter were several mullahs, priests of the Mussulman faith who, in central Asia, were as often as not the prime movers in organising civil war at our expense. But necessity knows no law. I was polite; so were they. One of the mullahs, an old and influential man, made a profound impression upon me by the simple dignity of his welcome. He received me in a huge, dilapidated building where, no doubt, he lived all alone. The court of honour was completely bare of furniture; so were the various rooms, in one of which an aged ascetic was squatting on a carpet. His last feeble spark of life seemed to be concentrated in his eyes, which were expressive of shrewdness and humanity. He had the reputation of being a sort of saint, and Reza-Khan corresponded with him, and always came to see him when he was in Recht.

Reza-Khan had probably decided to see what could be got out of the new Soviet ambassador, for it came to our ears that a conflict was about to begin, during which my position would be particularly delicate. The local authorities were seizing, on one excuse or another, the lands belonging to our protégés. I intervened with requests and threats and won my point. But that wasn't all. Some detachments of Persian police established themselves on the edge of the fishing-grounds which we controlled, and were quite obviously preparing to strike a surprise blow with the object of occupying them. . . . In great haste the members of the Soviet consulate staff began to erect barbed wire fences and post sentries. The situation grew worse from hour to hour. I wired to Teheran for instructions. Choumiatsky's reply was: "Whatever happens don't permit occupation of fishing-grounds. Two gunboats at your disposal. . . ." The vessels in question were called the *Lenin* and the *Trotsky*. . . . Chicherin, seriously alarmed by what was happening, wrote me a personal letter in which he said: "At all costs you must avoid a quarrel which might involve the whole of our foreign policy in the East. . . ." Whether I gave way, therefore, or whether I resisted, I should have to face a very complex situation. The question was, how could I avoid giving way and yet not resort to arms? An attempt to force the defences was, indeed, made, but luckily resulted in no bloodshed or fighting. Our sentries gave the alarm, and Reza-Khan's men showed no sign of wishing to expose themselves to our fire. I played the strong man act for all it was worth and made a great show of ringing up the officer in command of the flotilla, telling him to prepare a landing-party to proceed ashore in case of necessity, and to be ready to cover them with his guns should they be attacked. Then I paid a visit to the military governor to tell him that I reserved to myself complete liberty of action, and was determined to defend our undeniable rights. . . . The whole business, of course, was a piece of bluff. I should never have given the order to open fire. But the military governor withdrew his men, and the day was won. From that moment our relations began to improve.

Choumiatsky, by now settled in Teheran, had big ideas of his own, and it is possible that Reza-Khan's government got wind of them. In order to put a spoke in the wheel of British influence, our people in Moscow, seeing that the attempt to provoke a Persian revolution had failed, were determined to strengthen the hands of the central power in that country so as to undermine the influence of the local nobles who were always susceptible to foreign intrigue. Their plan, in short, was to help in the establishment of a modern State with which it could live on terms of friendliness based upon mutual trade. A great deal of water had flowed under the bridge since those days in Tashkent and Bokhara when we had dreamed of turning Asia upside down! It was to our interest now to encourage the growth of national sentiment, and to favour the building up of a national bourgeois State of traders and bureaucrats. I received instructions couched roughly in the following terms: "Suggest the advisability of forming a National Party. . . . Get the leading men of the country to telegraph to the capital demanding the institution of a National Government. . . ." Unfortunately we had no money and nothing to sell. Our hands, consequently, were tied.

My personal idealism, at this time, suffered a number of shocks. I learned the part played in politics by money. On more than one occasion I found myself up against the seamy side of international affairs. For instance, a seid asked me for an audience. What he said was, in substance, this: "I have got leave to start a paper." (That he had got leave may have been true; but he had no intention whatever of following it up.) "Now, I am a proved friend, my dear sir, of your great country. Lenin is the greatest man who has appeared in the world since the Prophet, and I should like to produce a journal of strong Russophil leanings. The English are intriguing against you. Mr. Trott is animated by the blackest intentions. What I need is a sum of 300 *toumans* a month. . . ." I



[*Topical Press*

ZINOVIEV

(IN CENTRE WITHOUT HAT)

thanked this well-wisher, and promised to think over his proposal.

The memory left with me by another visitor is still more picturesque. He was a Kurdish warrior who had held an official position of some sort but was now out of a job. He was richly dressed and, in true mountain fashion, carried a dagger and a pistol stuck in his silk sash. No doubt to put the interview on a friendly footing he obligingly laid the pistol on my office table. On the pretext of offering him a cigarette I opened the drawer in which I kept my own revolver. In a quiet voice he pointed out that it was no uncommon thing for a man to have enemies. Husbands, he said, are sometimes troublesome; servants are not always to be trusted; the authorities may, at times, show an ugly temper. Anything, in fact, may happen, and it is always well to have at one's disposal a reliable and discreet assistant who, in case of need, can be relied upon to get rid of the awkward husband, the embarrassing journalist, the disloyal servant, without undue fuss. He assured me that there were a number of influential persons who were not above making use of him. . . . I made a note of his address. (Perhaps it is a pity that I afterwards mislaid it!)

One morning in January I was called to the telephone. I heard the Vice-Consul at Enzeli speaking in a voice shaken by emotion.

"Vladimir Illitch is dead."

"What's that?—Lenin?"

"Lenin is dead."

We had all forgotten that he was mortal. We had known that he was ill. What would happen to the Party and to the Revolution without him? The overwhelming, the terrible, news was like an angry gust blowing through the open windows of the house. From that moment I knew no peace, and the nerves of my staff were kept on edge. There was no time to think, no time to realise the immense significance of what had occurred. I had to telephone to Teheran for instructions and issue them to my assistants; to telegraph to Moscow; to assemble the members of the Communist cell; to summon all the Soviet citizens to a meeting; to inform the Persian authorities; to receive the visitors who started coming almost at once; to organise some sort of ceremony for them and for the Russian colony. . . . This ceremony took place the same day in the Court of Honour of the Consulate-General across which were stretched as usual red transparencies bearing, for purpose of local propaganda, slogans written in Russian and in the language of Firdausi: "Proletarians of the World Unite"; "Oppressed of Every Land Unite Against Imperialism!" A platform had been erected beneath these transparencies, on which I took my place in order to read the official *communiqué* and to say a few words. Before me on a carpet stood the civil governor, the military governor, a sartip, a much-bemedalled general, the mullahs of the chief mosques, and the heads of the Chamber of Commerce. All wore formal mourning: some of them may have been genuinely worried, for Lenin had become a symbol for the whole of Asia. Monsieur Saed, the Persian Consul, later Chargé d'Affaires at Moscow, represented his ministry on this occasion. I thought suddenly of the rather outworn slogans displayed behind me. "Ah well," I reflected, "Lenin has produced a lot of others!"

Night came. Exhausted by the labours of the day, I retired to my living-quarters—a succession of almost empty rooms occupying the whole of one floor. I sat down, my head in my hands, thinking of nothing. Then gradually I tried to understand. The lives of even the greatest individuals must end sooner or later, but life goes on. Before my eyes was an official portrait of Lenin. It seemed to me that until then I had never really seen it. For a long time, in the darkness of the night, I paced up and down the empty rooms in solitude. Only once before had I felt a similar emotion, a similar sensation of pain, when I had stood beside the communal graves where the soldiers who had been my friends but a few hours earlier, full of life and enthusiasm, had just been unceremoniously buried. . . . What was going to happen to us now? Who was to take the wheel of this great ship with its course set to the future through uncharted seas, with its amateur crew, its battered machinery, its young and daring engineers? A few brilliant men remained: Trotsky, Dzerjinsky, Piatakov, Rykov, Bukharin, Radek. . . . I scarcely thought of Stalin. He was very little known, and, back there in 1924, it seemed unlikely that he could ever play a leading role. Undoubtedly Zinoviev and Kaménev would dispute with Trotsky the moral right to be Vladimir Illitch's successor, but to the men of my generation they had no claim.

The year 1924 saw a sudden change in our diplomatic policy. Great Britain recognised the U.S.S.R. and reopened relations which had been in abeyance since 1918. The other Great Powers followed suit. Soviet opinion counted this development as a considerable success, and saw in it a guarantee of peaceful development in the years to come. In the microcosm of my Consulate-General these matters appeared in terms of my relations with Mr. Trott. We used to meet occasionally, and we knew each other well by sight, but we were not friendly simply because our respective countries were not. Ought I to go and congratulate him on what had happened, or was it for him to make the first sign? I telephoned Teheran and asked for instructions. The Embassy told me to wait until important questions of procedure had been settled. The staffs of both countries were going into the question at Moscow. The various ranks of the diplomatic and consular officials concerned, and the dates of their arrival at their posts, were being made the object of a scrupulous examination. It appeared eventually that I could claim some slight seniority over Mr. Trott in the official hierarchy, and that I had reached Recht a few hours ahead of him. It was his duty, therefore, to pay the first visit. I returned it the same day. Mr. Trott was not very fluent in French, but knew Farsi well. Our conversation, therefore, was carried on in Persian. With great pride he showed me his garden, which was full of the scent of roses, and carried friendliness so far as to stick one of the finest flowers in my buttonhole. Since his own coat was similarly adorned we had a little joke about the Wars—and the Peace—of the Roses! Should these lines come that gentleman's way, I should like him to know that I have a pleasant memory of the occasion. My delight in establishing cordial relations with him was all the greater since, shortly before our arrival at Recht, there had been a series of curious incidents—including a theft of documents from the British consulate, which had been followed by the murder of a servant in the employment of Mr. Trott's predecessor.

It was in Mr. Trott's flower-surrounded consulate that I also met Sir Percy Loraine, the British minister in Persia, on his way to Teheran. His activities in the Near East, at that time pretty widely known, had made his name familiar in Moscow even in the days when I was pursuing my studies at the College. For that reason I was particularly glad to meet him. I was more than usually interested in our conversation, because I wanted to get some idea of the sort of adversary Choumiatsky would find himself up against in the international struggle for influence in the country of the Sha-in-Shah. I got the impression that Sir Percy was a rival to be reckoned with.

Persia was passing through one of the decisive periods of her history. Little by little Reza-Khan was getting all the sources of power into his own hands. As Prime Minister and Minister for War, he was forming a new administration, reorganising the armed forces, and studying the fiscal question with a view to reforms. The Shah, who was now little but a nominal sovereign, had taken leave of absence, and was about to go to Europe. Reza-Khan's idea was to give the country the constitution of a strongly centralised republic, on the model of Turkey, of which he would be president for life. As though at the wave of a magic wand a republican movement came suddenly into being. Republican newspapers sprouted ready-made from the ground. Down with the dynasty! Down with the monarchy! Long live Progress! Such was the tenor of the messages sent to Reza-Khan by various groups of merchants. These manifestations of opinion coincided with the weakening of the civil governors. All the real power passed into the hands of the military governors, who were devoted to the War Minister. The agitation went a good deal farther than had been intended. Peasants staged manifestations at Recht in the course of which they demanded that the land should be handed over to them. Workmen and fishermen, mindful of the insurrection of 1920, created disturbances at Enzeli and displayed the Red Flag. (I noticed that portraits of the leader of these outbreaks, Koutchouk-Khan, were frequently carried in procession without any attempt of the police to suppress them.) And then, just as suddenly as it had arisen, the anti-monarchist wave subsided. Reza-Khan, in whose hands now rested supreme power, having liquidated the reigning dynasty without bloodshed, was preparing to become the Sovereign Pehlevi in his turn.

The customs of the Persians were ripe for radical change. Women still wore a sort of veil which concealed half their faces. In the streets they gave the wall to the men. But I had occasion to notice that they showed no particular shyness even where foreigners were concerned. They displayed a very active curiosity and were at all times ready to enter into conversation. I remember riding in a motor-bus in Teheran surrounded by veils and inquisitive glances, and I can hear in memory the exclamations that broke out on all sides when I revealed the fact that I could talk Persian. At once I became a target for questions: Was I married? Did I like Teheran? Was I going to be long in Persia? Was I a soldier or a merchant? But concurrently with this movement towards freedom went a religious Puritanism officially encouraged. When I gave a party at Recht, at which I intended showing a number of films, the religious authorities insisted that there should be a special session for women in a locked room, and took great care to arrange matters so that the mechanics in the projection box could not see the audience. I showed the tragic film of the death and funeral of Lenin, with its shots of Gorky's little house under snow, the Russian crowd waiting in 28 degrees of frost to file past the bier of Vladimir Illitch, the guard of honour round the uncovered coffin, and Zinoviev, Kaménev, Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsky, watching over their friend, the masses of men and women clad in deep mourning moving to the light of torches along the black and white streets. . . . The audience of Persian women, ignorant though they were of winter and of snow, knowing nothing of our frozen Russia with its deep buried passions, was yet susceptible to an access of profound emotion, for there on the screen what was being depicted was no less than the death of the great Prophet of Russia.

My contacts, too, with the merchant class left me with the feeling that I was dealing with a people ripe for important reforms. On the other hand, the procession of the *Shakseivakhsei*, or the celebrations held to commemorate the death of Hussein, the descendant of the Prophet, gave evidence that there was still operative in Persian life a strong element of barbarous crudity. On such occasions the fanatic *chiites* crowded the streets, wailing and mutilating themselves. The men, some of them with fetters on their limbs, gashed their bodies and their faces with daggers, swords and scimitars. After a very short time they were dripping blood. The glaring white of the clothes, the dusty sunlight, the rags, the agonised faces, the general sense of exaltation, fatigue and suffering, the sight of blood mingled with sweat and dust —all these things combined to give to the crowd an appearance of fantastic savagery. On reaching the great courtyard where the women, the authorities, the important personages and their guests were sitting to watch the spectacle, those participating in the procession redoubled their efforts at self-mortification, pirouetting slowly in what looked like a sort of arena filled with the sight of blood and the sound of lamentations. Those who were rich managed to come through the ordeal without a scratch, having satisfied their craving for martyrdom and the demands of tradition, by hiring some poor devil to lacerate himself in their stead and to walk beside them in the ceremonies.

CHAPTER XVII

TEHERAN, STAMBUL, ATHENS, ROME, BERLIN, MOSCOW

I TOOK the trip narrated in this chapter during 1924 when a renewal of my malaria made it imperative that I should get away for the time being from a climate in which my strength was daily being sapped. Choumiatsky raised no difficulties about giving me leave of absence, and Iouréniev, at that time ambassador in Rome, invited me to spend my holiday with him. Between Recht and Teheran my car followed a road which led at first through wooded hills and later across a sandy plain. The forests of northern Iran cover a series of heights which at times deserve the name of mountains. Frequent streams and bright-coloured villages give to the scene a charm which is very different from the appearance of the arid tableland which develops as one approaches the capital.

Teheran, despite its mosques and one or two buildings designed on western lines, seemed to me not very unlike Tashkent or any of the other centres of Asiatic Russia. During the summer months the Embassy moved out to Zerghinde, a mountain resort whither Reza-Khan was accustomed to retire for relaxation, where it occupied a number of cool buildings set in a shady, sunny wood. Each building contained an office and a bedroom, for the members of Choumiatsky's staff always had a great number of things to do. Our Military Attaché, Bobristchev, offered to take me with him on a tour of the warlike and nomadic tribes of the south, but Choumiatsky would not allow it. I made the acquaintance of the latter's assistant, Meyer, a former anarchist lately returned from America, with whom I was to come into contact some years afterwards when, with Dybetz, he was directing the automobile industry. Both men paid with terms of imprisonment in 1937 for their association with Bukharin in America during the war.

In order to strengthen our commercial influence, Choumiatsky was establishing a number of mixed Soviet–Persian companies in conjunction with several native business men, financed by a Soviet–Iranian bank set up on his initiative. This bank was administered by a young financial expert called Arkus, who was thought to be exceptionally able. In strict accordance with Party rules, we of the Service were in receipt of salaries limited to a maximum of 250 dollars a month. On the boards of these mixed companies, however, the Soviet directors were paid the same as their Iranian colleagues, so that their emoluments compared very favourably with those of the diplomatic and consular staffs. Arkus was the only one of them all who turned over the balance to the funds of the Party. He later became a director of the State Bank, and his name figured among those of the other "conspirators" who were involved in the Zinoviev trial. But he never appeared before a court of law, and somebody else must have been responsible for the "confession" which was said to have been got from him. He refused to inculpate himself or blacken his own reputation, and was no doubt secretly shot. There, in Teheran, we never dreamed of such tragic endings to our various destinies.

Karim Khakkimov, my friend and predecessor, passed through the town on his way to take up a new appointment as Consul in Meshed. Has he survived? Perhaps his presence in isolated posts where he could be more useful than anybody else, has been instrumental in saving him. He was a workman, a miner, of Tartar origin, a true child of the Revolution. A Mussulman by birth who had become a Communist, self-educated but well-read, and gifted with the sort of tact that makes the successful diplomat, he had marvellous success in his attempts to establish contact with his co-religionists. Some years later, he became the first Soviet minister in the Hedjaz, and the fact that he was a Mussulman led to his being permitted to reside at Mecca—a concession of high importance. He returned home in order to study at the Communist Academy under the directorship of Bukharin, after which he returned to the Hedjaz, and I lost sight of him.

I was on the point of being given the position of First Secretary of Embassy at Teheran when malaria laid me low. Slavoutsky, whom I have already mentioned, was appointed to replace me. So bad was my health that I decided to go into hospital at Enzeli. The air of the high plateau did me good. When the time came for me to leave my post, I handed over to Levitsky, who ranked as an "old Bolshevik" by virtue of a membership of the Party which dated from 1909 or 1910. He started his career in the Diplomatic Service, but later joined the Opposition and vanished from sight in some prison or other during 1928.

The Georgian insurrection delayed my journey to the Black Sea. For several days Baku was entirely cut off from Tiflis. Finally, however, I embarked at Batum for Naples on an Italian steamer, the comfort, cleanliness and food of which offered a strong contrast to the easy-going habits of the East. This was my third contact with the West, about the material conditions of which I still held a number of quite illusory views.

The boat followed the coastline of Anatolia, putting in for a day each at Trebizond, Ineboli, and Samsun, pretty little Turkish villages consisting of white houses built in terraces on the slopes of green hills. We frequented the small cafés where real Arab Mocha could be got. It took us a week to reach the Bosphorus. I leave to poets the task of describing the lights of the Golden Horn and the charm of Stambul. In the huge building which had formerly been the Imperial Russian Embassy and was now the Consulate-General of the U.S.S.R., my colleague, Vladimir Potiemkin, gave me a warm welcome. He was an ex-professor of bourgeois origins, and, though a member of the Party, no longer wielded any authority. At this time the Communists had no particular love for men who had joined them when victory was assured, and only too readily accused them of self-seeking.

Oustinov was the Soviet representative at Athens. An ex-revolutionary Socialist, he was a man of high culture, charming and refined, who was intimate with every phase of revolutionary politics. He died in 1937 at Tallinn, where he was Soviet minister, and the circumstances of his end are wrapped in mystery. There is a rumour that he refused to go back to Moscow where he knew he was marked out for persecution, and killed himself, either voluntarily or under pressure. His First Secretary at Athens in 1924 was a certain Dmitrievsky, later Chargé d'Affaires in Sweden whence, in 1932 or 1933, he refused to return to Russia. He became an emigré and published a very remarkable book which, when I read it, seemed to me to bear the definite marks of official inspiration.

Greece, of which I got a glimpse at this time, was both gay and tragic. As a result of its defeat in Asia Minor, this little country had had to provide asylum for a million and a half Hellenes who had been driven from Turkey by the victorious Ghazi. This enormous total represented a quarter or a fifth of the whole population of a poor kingdom already exhausted by a war. Athens, however, looked as radiant as ever. I spent almost a week there. Madame Oustinov, the minister's wife, a simple and charming woman, gave up several days to showing me the sights of the neighbourhood. We visited the museums, the Acropolis, the island of Aegina, Eleusis and Sunium. . . . At this latter place I saw with deep emotion the name of Byron cut deeply into the white marble of a temple column. Gazing on the blackened letters, I recalled that great poet's powerful and melancholy lines:

> . . . Place me on Sunium's marbled steep
>   Where nothing save the waves and I
> May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
>   There swan-like let me sing and die! . . .

Oustinov and Dmitrievsky introduced me to the diversions of the Western world, and for the first time in my life I paid a visit to a dance-hall. . . . It was the custom to pay, in shops and cafés, with halves of bank-notes, for the government had hit on the ingenious idea of thus dividing all notes in circulation, on pain of annulment, thus reducing their value by fifty per cent. I can recommend this extremely simple method of solving the difficulties of public finance. That some such fiscal reform had been necessary was obvious from the number of barracks filled with miserable refugees which met the eye at every turn around the capital.

Two passengers of renown left the Piræus at the same time as myself: Émile Vandervelde and Georges Duhamel. I did not have the honour of making their acquaintance. I had very mixed feelings about them. Wasn't one the representative of a bourgeois culture from the influence of which we were intent on shaking ourselves free, and the other a leader of that "reformism" which had done so much to prevent the success of revolution in several countries of Europe? I discussed this point at length with a young Belgian Socialist, Van der Ginst, who had accompanied Vandervelde to Sofia. We walked up and down the deck in heated argument, the blue of the sea and the blue of the sky serving to keep us friendly despite the complete divergence of our views. I belonged to a generation of Russians reared under the dictatorship of the proletariat, familiar with no ideas, no doctrines, no convictions but those of Bolshevism. I had grown up hearing nothing else, convinced that we were the guardians of self-evident truth, and that no adversary had anything to teach us. And here I was, face to face with a young Westerner, a Socialist like myself in his ideals, who offered to my contemplation a totally different, but strongly constructed, system; who questioned all my values many of which he categorically denied. My own judgments were simple and admitted of no appeal. Reformism, because of its willingness to compromise with the bourgeoisie and its horror of necessary violence, had betrayed the working class, which, having learned wisdom from its previous mistakes, would end by throwing in its lot with us.

"Well, all I can say is, look out," remarked the young Belgian. "By giving a free hand to violence Bolshevism has provoked a reaction which no respect for human dignity will serve to check. The answer to Red revolution is Fascist revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat has brought into existence the compensating phenomenon of a dictatorship of the reactionaries. What good is all that to mankind? Recourse to violence means the liquidation of just those energies which are the most valuable to-day—and on which Socialism must most rely."

This way of thinking seemed to me the product of a sort of cowardice typical of middle-class intellectuals, of those cultivated and well-meaning people who lacked all power to take the decisions so essential to a social struggle which could be victorious only by dint of exercising the most uncompromising aggressiveness. We Bolsheviks believed in harnessing the energy of the proletariat. . . . That was the gist of my reply. Seven years later we were to take up the argument again, but our roles were to be rather different. To that I shall return. But the question which we then debated is never long out of my mind. I brood over it in solitude; I have talked it out with many different people. I must admit that my unyielding point of view of 1925 seems now a little out of date.

In this way we continued on our voyage until at last we entered the Bay of Naples, where the light and the colours are so dazzling that the traveller feels he has lived until that moment in semi-darkness. After the sleepiness of Persia the wealth of Italy's historical past went at once to my head. I wandered among her ruins, visited her museums, looked at her monuments. I climbed Vesuvius. I saw enough masterpieces and amassed enough memories to suffice for the rest of my life. I was the only too willing prey of the tourist agencies. Iouréniev, warned by telegram from Athens of my imminent arrival, took a great deal of trouble to make things easy for me. He was spending his leave at Capri with Krestinsky, our ambassador in Berlin, and both men arrived in Rome simultaneously with myself. Iouréniev maintained in our Italian Embassy a way of life worthy of the earliest days of the Revolution, but which elsewhere had long become a thing of the past. All the staff ate in common. The ambassador, his family, the typists and the clerks all used the same dining-room and fed off the same food. Outside business hours the effects of "seniority" and "juniority", the sense of hierarchic distinctions, were reduced to a minimum. But this did not prevent Iouréniev, who was indeed a remarkable man, from being surrounded by an atmosphere of comradely devotion which he fully deserved and which was something quite different from the respect to which his official position entitled him.

His diplomatic career, however, very nearly came to a premature end some months later, as the result of an error into which I, knowing his political tact, never, at the time, quite understood how he allowed himself to fall. It was at the time when Mateotti had been kidnapped in broad daylight in the streets of Rome and was afterwards found dead somewhere in the suburbs. The very day before the kidnapping, Iouréniev had asked Mussolini to dine, and this invitation had been accepted by the Duce. And then, suddenly, following on the events of a single night, it looked as though the whole Fascist system would collapse, swept away by an outburst of popular disgust and the condemnation of the working-class movements in every country of Europe. Disclaimers and repudiations showed that there was danger even within the ranks of Government supporters. The Liberal Opposition tried to exploit the situation. It was common talk that the régime was tottering and that nothing but the irresolution of its Liberal and Socialist opponents could save it. The King, who feared a possible revolutionary outbreak, and whose hands the Parliamentary Opposition decided to leave free, did not demand Mussolini's resignation. For a whole week he struggled against a situation which was growing hourly more threatening. In diplomatic circles it was thought that his fall was inevitable. If he had gone out of power as the result of a political assassination he would never have got back. The Italian Liberals and Communists forwarded a request to Iouréniev to cancel the dinner. The Embassy staff saw eye to eye with the Italian Communists. Instructions received from Moscow were couched in the same vein. The Soviet authorities, kept informed by their own diplomatic representatives and by the secret agents whom they employed all over Europe, considered that Mussolini's days were numbered.

Iouréniev showed himself to be shrewder than most of the political observers of the day. He estimated at its true worth the Opposition Party that had withdrawn to the Aventine, saw that it was poor in resources and lacking in resolution. He maintained that the Fascist régime had built up a political and bureaucratic system which would be quite strong enough to resist any attack that such adversaries would be likely to launch against it. He had no intention of compromising Italo–Soviet relations which showed every indication of returning to normal. The Italy of Mussolini and the Germany of the Weimar Constitution were the only two countries with which we were on terms of friendship. (It is generally known that the U.S.S.R. was seeking to assume the leadership of the revisionist States who were discontented with the Treaty of Versailles.) The gala dinner, therefore, took place. Iouréniev, diplomatic representative of a socialist and revolutionary power, and himself a man of no little courage, welcomed to his table Benito Mussolini, head of a Fascist government. The episode was much talked about in Italian society, and its effects, even beyond the frontiers, were not negligible. It showed quite clearly that Soviet diplomacy could not only strike out a line at variance with the policy of the Communist International, but that it didn't mind, when necessity arose, proving false to the spirit of Socialist solidarity.

Shortly afterwards Iouréniev was recalled to Moscow. The stability of the Fascist régime fully justified the attitude he had taken up, Litvinov's friendship sufficed to save him from any really serious consequences, and all that happened was that he was deprived of seniority—that is to say that he was given posts of rather less importance, first at Vienna, and later in Teheran. Afterwards, when

THE BAY OF VOULAGMENI, NEAR ATHENS, 1937 the Rome affair had blown over, he was appointed by Litvinov to the Embassy at Tokyo, a promotion which involved the personal approval of Stalin. From Tokyo he was transferred in 1937 to Berlin. He was invited to Berchtesgaden to present his credentials, and accepted the Führer's invitation to dinner. Two weeks later he was summoned to Moscow where, one night, he just vanished—as so many others had done before him. I gathered from the Soviet papers that a peculiarly inept and infamous charge of treason was hanging over his head. . . . I can't help thinking that Stalin had him purposely sent to Berlin with instructions, perhaps, to establish personal contacts with Hitler, and that his real object was to get rid of him by denouncing him as an agent of Germany or even perhaps of an international Fascist movement.

But I must return to 1924. No one at that time foresaw the rise of Stalin. Our mood was one of normal optimism. We were sure of ourselves and of the future. We thought that, provided no war came to interrupt the reconstruction of Soviet industry, our Socialist country would be able, within a few years, to offer to the world an example of a society based on principles of equality, with new blood flowing into its institutions and ideals, within whose frontiers liberty and prosperity would stride solidly forward. How could it be otherwise? The old Capitalist Europe was moving from crisis to crisis, while we were soon to present to the eyes of humanity the spectacle of what could be achieved with a little revolutionary surgery. This conviction was shared by all of us.

Krestinsky and Iouréniev spoke with happy confidence of the internal difficulties of a régime based upon the dictatorship of the proletariat. The former looked on his mission to Berlin as a purely temporary and, in any case, mild form of disgrace. He had devoted his life to the

Party, had acted as secretary to the Central Committee at Lenin's side, was completely devoid of personal ambition, and asked nothing better than to dedicate his existence to the service of the cause. But Stalin, a thoroughly second-rate man whom no one dreamed of suspecting, was already making use of the administrative powers which he wielded as Secretary-General to remove from Moscow on plausible pretexts all the men of outstanding ability.

On my way home from taking a cure in Germany, I found Krestinsky at the Berlin Embassy. It was the time of the revolutionary celebrations of the 7th and 8th of November. Those of the 7th were official, and were attended by representatives of the Diplomatic Corps, journalists, generals and various distinguished guests. In the morning Krestinsky had spoken in the great hall of the Conservatorium before an audience composed of the employees of various Soviet undertakings, including several hundred German Communists who worked in the offices of the Commercial Delegation. On the 8th the heads of the German Communist Party were entertained at 11 Unter Den Linden, where they felt themselves thoroughly at home and were loud in their expressions of delight. How many, I wonder, of those with whom I rubbed shoulders then have since died in the prisons and concentration camps of the Third Reich or in those of the O.G.P.U.? The German Communists who fled to Russia were treated in 1936 and '37, as were political refugees in almost every country of the world, with great cruelty. Our friends of the West, who had come from every quarter in the hope of finding an asylum in the freest country on earth, are now confined in the prisons of the O.G.P.U. Stalin and Ejov have got locked away in their gaols hundreds and thousands of foreign revolutionaries, sometimes whole administrative committees of

Communist parties of other lands, "brothers" from Poland, Latvia, Esthonia, Hungary, and elsewhere.

Krestinsky and his wife, a woman militant of the early days, whose face was young despite her spectacles, opened the ball that followed. The evening wound up with singing, alternate choirs, German and Russian, contributing.

I made a short stay in a sanatorium near Dresden, returned to Recht to see that my successor was properly established, and then left for Moscow where I was to stay for several years. Owing to my malaria, I had to give up all thought of making a career in the East.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST TROTSKYISM

LIKE every Communist official, I was held at the disposition of the Central Committee. I found myself relegated to the reserve roster of the Foreign Office, though with special reference to the Commissariat of External Commerce. These two departments were, in fact, closely connected. I had declined the offer of the post of Consul in China. It sounded not very interesting, and I gathered that the climate of Canton was no better than that of Ghilan—an important consideration in view of my latent tendency to malaria. Sun Yet Sen, fleeing from Chen-tzu-Min, was at that time in hiding somewhere near Canton, and no one had the slightest inkling of the powerful movement that was to be set on foot twelve months later.

The interest of Party members in Moscow was entirely taken up by discussions on the subject of Trotskyism. Far away in Persia and elsewhere I had heard but faint echoes of the quarrel. The younger people, like myself, were inclined to simplify the issue. For us it was merely a question of who was to succeed Lenin, and we were strongly of opinion that one man, and one man only, had a right to the position, because he was head and shoulders superior to his fellow-claimants and could depend upon our unswerving loyalty. That one man was Trotsky. But the older members of the Party were plotting against him. They produced, sometimes very plausibly, a number of charges of heretical doctrine, a matter on which we were fitted neither by experience nor knowledge to pronounce. The Communist rank and file at this period were floundering badly in a quagmire of Marxist catchwords. Whatever the truth of the matter might be, the group to which I belonged took very much to heart these attacks levelled at Trotsky. Didn't his fame, and his unique authority in matters both of conduct and politics, stand as assets beyond price? Apart from all question of dogma, Trotsky was marked out by character and intelligence as the obvious head of the movement. We felt that there was something depressing, something disillusioning, about this state of personal rivalry among our leaders. To-day, looking back, I can see that personal rivalry played, in fact, a very secondary part in the crisis, and that what seemed a battle of coteries was the coming to grips of two opposing and mutually irreconcilable systems. But in 1925 this was not realised by most of the men of my generation.

I remember the sense of satisfaction with which I read Stalin's articles entitled "The Permanent Revolution and Comrade Trotsky". Their tone was polite, their object the refutation of Trotsky's theory that only if the Revolution were continuous and international could it succeed; that if it were confined within the frontiers of a single country and stabilised at any single stage of its development it must sooner or later collapse. Stalin, supporting his argument with frequent quotations from the writings of Lenin, reproached Trotsky with a complete misunderstanding of the part to be played by the peasants. The Party, need only win over the peasants, he maintained, to be able to pursue its ideal of Socialisation without having to rely on working-class support from abroad. Thirteen years later these old arguments with their shoddy logic and their treacherous promises, not one of which has been realised, seem to me to have been dictated by ignorance and duplicity. No one has imposed greater suffering on the peasants than Stalin; no one has more completely given the lie to Lenin's doctrine of the proper relations between the Communist Party and the farmers. The U.S.S.R., far from building the great Socialist future, has, in fact, established a régime which is infinitely nearer to Fascism than to Socialism, and a great deal crueller. In 1925 I was convinced. The "Permanent Revolution" seemed to me to be a dangerous theory. I felt relieved that I, with the majority of the members of the Communist cell at the Commissariat for External Trade, could vote for the Central Committee, that is to say, for Zinoviev, Kaménev and Stalin. I deplored the necessity of voting against Trotsky, but, since he persisted in his errors, I felt it to be my duty to do so.

Trotsky resigned from the presidency of the Supreme War Council and became president of the Committee of Concessions. Zinoviev, president of the Communist International and of the Leningrad Soviet, was undeniably the leading figure at the Political Bureau, and clearly designated as Lenin's successor in the leadership of the Party. (Alexis Rykov had been elected in Lenin's stead to the nominal headship of the Government.)

My work was not confined to administrative routine, for I had been appointed by the Zamoskvoretchie District Committee of the Party as director of two evening schools run under the auspices of the Party. The chief of these was concerned with the textile industry. I had to lecture to my classes on matters of theory and practice. I expected to find myself talking to a lot of young people and workers in the trade, but I noticed that among my listeners were quite a number of old militants who were now on the boards of business departments, or directing State enterprises. There they sat side by side with junior clerks whose membership of the Party was only a few months old. "We must keep ourselves up to date," they said—and not without reason, for everything was beginning to change imperceptibly.

I was living alone in a small room near the centre of the city. My two sons were growing up in charge of their grandmother, who lived in the province of Kiev. The activities of the Party formed my sole interest. Its internal discords and the bickerings about points of dogma had died down for eighteen months, when suddenly, in 1926, they burst into new and surprisingly violent life. At the XIVth Conference of the Party an unheard-of, an incredible, thing happened. Zinoviev found himself in a minority, and with him all his Leningrad friends, including Kaménev, president of the Moscow Soviet, vice-president of the Council of Labour and Defence, in fact, the directing influence in the Government. Stalin had prepared the ground well. All the delegates, with the exception of those from Leningrad, who were drawn from the ranks of civil servants who owed everything to Zinoviev and had worked with him since the beginning of the Revolution, had been appointed by the secretaries of the various local organisations, themselves appointed by Stalin, the Secretary-General. Stalin's slow sapping was beginning to show results. Zinoviev, too, had made himself unpopular by the violent and disloyal tone of his attacks on Trotsky, and by the disciplinary action which he had applied to his opponents. Nor did the defeats incurred by the Communist International under his direction add to his reputation. In Germany, in Bulgaria, in Esthonia, the Communist Party had suffered a number of bloody setbacks. I was one of those who was not sorry to hear of his sudden fall from power, and my general impression was that the Party as a whole shared my feeling of satisfaction.

Naturally questions of theory and of politics appeared to hold the front of the stage. Was Socialism possible in a single country? Zinoviev and Kaménev said no. Socialism, they argued, was international by definition, and necessarily presupposed the suppression of frontiers, if not all frontiers then at least those between the chief industrial countries. Stalin, on the other hand, maintained that "the U.S.S.R. possessed all the resources necessary to enable her to build up a Socialist system in one country alone". The official formula was a triumph of subtle phrasing and satisfied everybody. It was to the effect that we could *build* a Socialist system in a single country, but could not *carry the building to completion* until the Revolution had extended to other countries. This piece of casuistry masked two different mental attitudes: that of those who believed in an active revolutionary policy, and that of those who favoured a strategy of withdrawal and a cutting of losses.

Another debate began to rage round the question whether the Soviet industrial enterprises should be "rigorously Socialistic" in complexion. Kaménev used the phrase "State Capitalism", carrying his mischievous argument so far as actually to propose that the workers should be given a share in the profits of State enterprises. . . . How was it possible to see one's way clearly through all these confused issues? The young could only take the word of their better-informed elders. Whatever our hesitations and our doubts, the sentiment of loyalty to the Party was always the determining influence in our decisions. I was one of those who invariably backed up the findings of the Central Committee. We couldn't possibly know the amount of "rigging" that was going on inside it, and even if we *had* known, the threat of a Party schism would have frightened us into obedience. This argument—that any weakening of Party unity might provoke a crisis of which the forces of counter-revolution would not be slow to take advantage—was used time and time again to bring to naught various attempts at organising an Opposition, and finally played a decisive part in determining the downfall of the last of Lenin's former companions in arms.

Trotsky was enormously popular with us. The campaign against him, conducted by Zinoviev, to whom Stalin, with great astuteness, had left all initiative in the business, reserving to himself the role of moderating influence, had resulted in the piling up of a great deal of resentment against both Zinoviev and Kaménev. Both men, realising what had happened, made a sudden *volte-face*, and openly joined forces with their adversary of yesterday—Trotsky, the very incarnation of the spirit of opposition, who was developing in secret a scheme for the complete reformation of the régime.

I was one of the many non-voting delegates who attended the XIVth Party Congress, which was held in the Kremlin. During the intervals of adjournment the general public was admitted to the Hall of St. George, that vast waiting-room in white marble. I met there Georges Vassiliévitch Chicherin, with a broad grin on his face. He had just been elected to the Central Committee for the first time. It was probably the last great pleasure of his life. The Litvinov group fought bitterly with him for control of the Foreign Office and set itself to bring to nothing his every decision. Chicherin declared finally that he found it quite impossible to work with Litvinov. He was a very sick man and went on leave to Marienbad where he was sorely tempted to settle down. Long and tedious negotiations were necessary before he could be induced to go back to Moscow, although he was still officially People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs. Litvinov quite quietly stepped into his shoes, and Chicherin vanished from the political stage, forgotten even before he was dead. But obscurity was the least of his justifiable grievances, for he was the victim of black ingratitude and negligence on Litvinov's part. The one Foreign Minister of the Revolution to whom the Soviets owed much of their safety, was now condemned to live in a wretched little lodging without any efficient heating system. Acting on orders from the Central Committee Yagoda intervened and saw that he was properly looked after. He spent his last years in complete retirement and under an assumed name, occupying a modest flat in one of the narrow streets near the *Arbat*, and relieving his melancholy with a little music. He saw nobody except a few of the humbler of his former colleagues. When he died he was refused a State funeral, and his remains were buried at the monastery of Novo-Dievitchii.

The theoretical and political discussions at that time dividing the leaders of the Party seemed to me very much less important than the official acts of the Government. The N.E.P. was producing tiresome results. The various State enterprises were being frequently hindered, spoiled and cleverly exploited by private commercial concerns. As a general rule, the products of socialised industry were not reaching the consumer direct, but were falling into the hands of middle-men who passed them on at prices sometimes a hundred per cent higher than those they paid. A large amount of commercial capital was becoming available as a result of speculation, and of undercutting of nationalised industries by private initiative, which was freer and cleverer than the State-controlled concerns, and less troubled by questions of public welfare. The importance of money in social life grew, and its effects were demoralising. Gambling-houses and brothels made their appearance in the cities. Communists, dependent on very mediocre salaries, often found themselves at a disadvantage compared to the specialists, the tradesmen, and the "Capitalists" who were appearing as a new element in the common-weal. The unemployed were as badly off in Russia as they were in Berlin; the workers, unable to pay the comparatively high rents now demanded for the fine flats which they had occupied during the Revolution, were, little by little, drifting back to the slums, and many a dwelling that had been handsome and clean a few years previously, was now poverty-stricken and dilapidated.

The Department of External Commerce had appointed me a member of the Board of Directors of the *Méjdounarodnaya Kniga* or "International Book Company", the headquarters of which are still on the Kouznetsky-most in Moscow. Its business was the importation of books and paper from abroad. The total of our turnover rose to six million gold roubles a year, of which five million went on the purchase outside Russia of paper and office equipment. Foreign concessionaires were growing rich under our eyes from the manufacture in Russia of pencils, pens, cardboard, drawing-pins, pliers, etc. The biggest of them was an American company run by a Mr. Hammer. The State *Mospolygraph* Trust began making cheap pencils, but the quality was so bad that they could not compete with Mr. Hammer's more expensive goods. The concessionaires, who had obtained permission to export their profits in valuta, must have laughed at our inefficiency. The one idea of the Communist directors was to get the better of this competition, and to free the U.S.S.R. from this embarrassing flood of imports. The International Book Company decided to start manufacturing office equipment. A very small part of the sums employed in the purchase of foreign articles would suffice for the importation of the machinery necessary to make them ourselves. In that way we should reduce unemployment and free the country from dependence on outside supplies. Our first factory was set up in Moscow. Ipatiev, the great chemist and Academician, who quite recently refused to return to Russia from the United

States, and Professor Lapiro helped us to carry out our scheme. Krassin, the Commissar for External Commerce, gave us very efficient support. Full of enthusiasm for the plan, and fired by what had already been achieved, I was put in charge of this factory, and entrusted with the building of another in Leningrad which should specialise in the output of steel pens.

I found an old chocolate factory which had been taken over by the State, or rather, by the municipality. It was rat-ridden and draughty. The dispossessed owner had been kept on as caretaker. He tried to convince me that the building was quite unsuitable for my purpose, that its adaptation would be very costly, etc. What this gentleman who, I must say, had the patience of a saint, was after I don't know, but I suspect that all he cared about was keeping his precious bricks and mortar to himself. However that may be, I made short work of him and his objections, and in a very short while, equipped with machinery bought in Berlin and Prague, and under the control of a German technical expert, the "Krassin Works" were employing 400 young Communists who a few weeks earlier had been out of a job. The German expert was of the greatest possible value to us. His ingenuity and his devotion made it possible for us to achieve a quite unexpected success. In a few months we learned to produce pens which, from the very first, were adequate, and soon became excellent. The war against competition shifted to new ground.

The State departments continued to prefer the products of private enterprise and foreign concessionaires, even though they were more expensive than ours, for the industrialists offered commissions to the badly paid State servants in return for their orders. This form of corruption was, for several years, a regular scourge, as long indeed, as private enterprise was allowed to compete with the State factories. By 1929 the Krassin Works in Leningrad and Moscow had succeeded in overcoming foreign competition. The total value of their annual production amounted to six million gold roubles, and they employed a thousand hands.

We felt that we had won a victory, and that in spite of lack of encouragement from the Department of Commerce which had more than once advised us not to get involved in speculative ventures but to content ourselves with quietly selling books and articles from abroad. We had created a new industry, and saved the Treasury five million gold roubles a year. Speaking personally, I found that the running of the International Book Company gave me more tangible results than all my diplomatic discussions with the officials of Reza-Khan. I began to forget the East. One episode, not without its picturesque side, served to remind me of it and to make me smile at my young man's dreams. Amanullah Shah, King of Afghanistan, paid a visit to the U.S.S.R. He was our first Royal guest. Soviet Square in Moscow was ringed off by militiamen in white gloves, the approaches to the Lenin Institute were decorated with flowers, a carpet was laid down, and a cleaner was set to sweep the pavement clear of the least suspicion of dust, all because a foreign Crowned Head wanted to look at Lenin's autographs. The Shah arrived in a car, accompanied by Kalinin with a face as black as thunder and looking obviously ill at ease.

It seemed as though a hundred years must have passed since we had lived in the hope of overturning all the thrones of Asia. Raskolnikov, who had laid the foundations for the Persian revolution, was back from Kabul, decorated by Amanullah with the highest order of Afghanistan and rejoicing in the title of Royal Prince! He neither used the title nor wore the decoration.

Amanullah Shah asked us for advice, for motor-cars and for weapons. His career was very short. The year following he had to flee from his country, but Soviet influence in Afghanistan, peaceful henceforward, and moderate, was destined to survive his personal misfortunes.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BITTERNESS OF PARTY STRIFE

POLITICAL events, however, pursued their course. Although they had now thrown in their lot with Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kaménev had failed to recover their lost popularity. The memory of their campaign against the former chief of the Red Army was too green to make their *volte-face* seem anything but an unscrupulous and selfish piece of manœuvring. Either their opposition to Trotskyism had been insincere, or they were now being false to their principles. They had all the appearance of time-servers, while Stalin stood as the incarnation of the pure milk of the Leninistic word. But what was still worse for them was that they could rely only on the officials of the Party in Leningrad, those in the rest of the country having been carefully picked by Stalin. As to the mass of the ordinary members, it remained well out of the arena, confining its activities, necessarily, to voting for the strongest group. Under pressure from the Central Committee, the Leningrad officials, left in the lurch by the assemblies which had been called upon to vote either for Zinoviev or the Central Committee, were forced into the position of a minority and dismissed from their posts. One of Bukharin's pupils named Stetsky, who had abandoned his master very early, in order to stand well with Stalin, and whom I had already met at the War College, was sent to conduct the purge in Leningrad.

At the end of 1927, on the eve of the XVth Party Congress, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kaménev, the leaders of the "New Opposition", realising that the bureaucratic machine, excellently run by the staff of the Secretary-General, would give them not even a fighting chance at the Congress, since the delegates had all been chosen by officials devoted to Stalin to whom they owed their jobs and with whom they must stand or fall, decided to appeal direct to the Party—and from then on to ignore its discipline. A spontaneous manifestation in Leningrad, where Trotsky in particular was sympathetically greeted by silent but deeply stirred crowds, encouraged them. There followed a series of private meetings, arranged by them and held in the poor dwellings of Communist workers. The men who had been at the head of the Government during the unforgettable years, went here, there, and everywhere, sitting down familiarly at simple tables covered with squares of American cloth, their note-books before them, and discussing the situation with the militants of the streets. Political passion reached its culminating point, for the Chinese revolution, controlled in reality by the Communist International and the Political Bureau, was striding from victory to victory. The Opposition accused Stalin of being in league with Chiang-Kai-Shek and the Chinese bourgeoisie organised in the movement known as Kuomintang. It certainly is a fact that Stalin compelled the Chinese Communist Party to subordinate itself to the Kuomintang and to check the budding movements among the peasants and the workers, and that he remained deaf to all warnings that a military coup was being prepared at Shanghai against the Trades Unions and the Communist Party. Radek, who, as rector of the Chinese University in Moscow, was well placed to follow the details of the struggle, made no bones about joining with Trotsky and Zinoviev in denouncing these tactics, the disastrous effects of which were seen only too quickly. No sooner had Stalin publicly stated before a large audience in Moscow that he was assured of Chiang-Kai-Shek's co-operation, than the Shanghai blow fell, ushering in a period marked by much massacre of Communist

L. KAMÉNEV

supporters. From this moment the Chinese revolution was a lost cause from our, as well as from its own, point of view. The leaders, by turning against the popular features that had given the movement its vitality, deprived it precisely of those forces which might have won the victory and brought real independence to the country. As a result, Stalin's reputation was fatally compromised, and he decided to have recourse to more violent methods. In Moscow, the secretary of the Krassnaya Pressnia Party District Committee, a man named Rioutine, had the idea of enlisting gangs of toughs armed with cudgels and equipped with whistles, whose duty it should be to prevent the Opposition orators getting a hearing at the regular meetings of the Party. Other gangs of the same kind, taking orders from members of the Central Control Committee of the Party—such, for instance, as Moroz, a former officer of the Cheka (declared an enemy of the people in 1937), and Yaroslavsky—were to carry on the good work at the more private discussions among the individuals concerned.

On the eve of the 7th November celebrations of 1927, a rumour gained currency that the Opposition would attempt to organise some kind of street demonstration. The O.G.P.U. agents and the militia—that is to say the police—took, as yet, no part in such disturbances because Stalin did not dare call on them. The gangs formed by the Shop Committees referred to above were quite sufficient for the purpose of suppressing any probable outbreak. On the 7th November the flat of a member of the Central Committee—a supporter of the Opposition—who had decorated his balcony with portraits of Lenin, Trotsky and Zinoviev, was broken up. I was attending the review of troops on the Red Square, and had a seat on the official stand. There was a general nervousness in the air. So far the demonstrators had got no farther than the base of Lenin's tomb which, from fear of what the Opposition might do, was protected by a double line of militiamen. The only successful effort was that of the Chinese students, who did manage to unfurl beneath the official stand a red banner which they had concealed under their clothes and now displayed stretched from shoulder to shoulder. It bore these words: "Down with Opportunism in the Chinese Revolution". Almost all those who were carrying it perished later in China because Stalin, having sought to come to an understanding with the Kuomintang at a time when he was in a position to impose his conditions, later ordered insurrections against it—such as the bloody Commune of Canton—when the time for action was past. The sole reason for his doing so lay in his desire to destroy all recollection of his former policy, and to disguise his inglorious surrenders behind a façade of cheap heroism.

In the Central Committee discussion was growing more and more violent. The last occasion on which Trotsky spoke, a member of one of the Yaroslavsky gangs threw a heavy book at his head and only just missed him. Zinoviev's friends protected him with their bodies. Trotsky confined himself to saying, to an accompaniment of interruptions: "Well, if you can't use books to persuade people, you can at least knock them down with 'em."

Stalin dared not risk the Opposition getting a hearing at the XVth Party Conference. A few days before it opened, in November 1927, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kaménev were excluded on a charge of insubordination. Stalin, with his supporters, Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsky, appeared on the platform—an inglorious conqueror. I belonged to the Stalin majority, and I knew its views, but there was a touch of consternation in our applause and in our votes of confidence. The exclusion of the Opposition could be justified in our eyes only as a measure necessary to ensure the safety of the State and prevent an act of schism within the Party. When it was known that Trotsky was to be exiled to Central Asia, thousands of demonstrators tried to prevent the departure of the train that was to take him thither. He was seized by force a few days later and sent to Alma-Ata. At the last moment he refused to go. The police had to break down the door of his apartment and carry him out like a sick man. Once he was safely gone, the O.G.P.U. began to get busy, and the weary round of arrests, imprisonments and deportations started. . . . That is ten years ago; many of those early members of the Opposition are still in prison, if, that is, Stalin hasn't had them executed within the last few weeks.

In 1928 it became necessary to take exceptional measures in order to compel the peasants to hand over to the State the corn and the raw materials for which they considered the prices offered them to be too low. The difficulties foreseen by the Opposition began to materialise. Stalin lost his head and used force. Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky, and Ouglanov, who at that time was secretary of the Moscow Committee, insisted that there should be a return to normal conditions in the country districts. The Right backed them up, and then, all of a sudden, Stalin turned against it. He was astute enough to draw a psychological advantage from the resentment caused by the recent exclusions and arrests. The outlawry of the Trotskyists had been accepted only with much heart-burning, and the campaign against the Right, at first cleverly disguised, was welcomed by the Party.

Zinoviev and Kaménev had recanted publicly in the Congress, severing all connexion with the Opposition, and making unconditional submission to the majority. That was the beginning of the double game they were to play, consisting of simultaneously denying their own convictions and plotting secretly against the authorities, which eventually was to bring them to their deaths. The Right had not even the courage to go openly into opposition. I was present at a meeting of the active members of the Party in Moscow, in the course of which Ouglanov, who had shown no mercy towards the Trotskyists, made a pitiful recantation of his faults, promised with tears to toe the Party line in future, praised Stalin's clear-sightedness, and all the rest of it. I realised then that he and his companions were beaten. Not that they didn't command wide sympathy among the rank and file. Kalinin, Voroshilov and Yagoda were more or less on their side, and the country as a whole preferred them to Stalin because they demanded for the peasants liberty of production and exchange and the right to make money out of their farms. But the active elements of the Party were against them and supported Stalin only too gladly. Bukharin was in charge of the *Pravda*, and Stalin was extending his protection to a very talented young man named Kostrov, who was making of the *Komsomolskaya Pravda* the organ of the Youth Movement, an extremely vital daily which was more than once used as the mouthpiece of the Stalinist faction. Kostrov has since died. Most of the young men who helped Stalin in his struggle against the Right have perished because in later years they showed Opposition tendencies. Quite recently Stetsky and Ejov, whose rise dated from this time, were the only two left. The war against the Right was destined to be long-drawn out and carefully disguised. Every decision was taken by the Central Committee, using the Political Bureau as a stalking-horse. Several years later, Rioutine, who had distinguished himself by his uncompromising attitude towards Trotskyism, became the organiser of a secret group which attempted to impeach Stalin before the Party and aimed at coming to terms with the Trotsky faction. The first death sentence pronounced secretly by the O.G.P.U. against a member of the Party was against him. What happened to him in prison after he was reprieved no one knows.

The peasant question was daily getting worse. The Draconian measures enforced by Stalin were having the effect of disorganising agriculture, and the future looked bad. The Right continued to hope. Trotsky, with a few thousand other exiles, managed to maintain political contact which kept the older members of the Party in a constant state of simmering excitement. Ordered to refrain from his activities under threat of imprisonment, he refused. Stalin dared not carry out his threat, and the rumour went round that Trotsky was to be sent abroad. We were profoundly stirred, accustomed though we were to bad news. Up till then we had always regarded the differences of opinion between Communists, no matter how grave, as nothing compared with those that separated us from the world of Capitalism. And now there was talk of banishing Trotsky, that is to say, of handing him over to the Capitalists! I regarded such a possibility as the last word in infamy. For the first time I found myself driven secretly to condemn an action of the Central Committee's. But I could do nothing. No one could have done anything. The only Opposition then in existence, the Right, kept quiet and did its best not to be noticed.

I felt a second psychological shock of the same kind on the occasion of Stalin's fiftieth birthday, when the papers devoted columns to him and gave him the official title of Head of the Party. I had not forgotten what he had said in 1924, when the reference of his words had been obviously to Trotsky: "The Party needs no Heads: it has but one collective Head—the Central Committee." . . .

My friend Briquet, like myself a sincere supporter of Stalin, with whom I discussed the innovation, had great difficulty in persuading me that since the outlawry, exile and disgrace of so many of its members, the Party was beginning to lack authority. Wasn't it necessary that it should be able to rally round a man worthy of confidence by reason of his determination and his deep knowledge of Lenin's doctrine? It was as a result of such arguments that the worship of a Head became deeply rooted. Poor Briquet! No man was more sincerely devoted to Stalin, or more loyal to the "general line"—the new term used to denote Stalin's policy with the changes of direction which marked it roughly every three months or so. He became an influential official of the Party Committee of Control. In 1937 his name appeared casually in the list of those styled "enemies of the people" and held up to public execration or condemned to death or life imprisonment.

In 1929 I accepted an offer to work with the Commercial Delegation in Paris. In that way I should get a change of scene and still be able to serve the cause.

CHAPTER XX

PARIS; THE GREAT PLAN; THE BATTLE FOR GOLD

BEFORE leaving for Paris, I spent several days at the Central Committee's Rest House at Marino. Lazar Kaganovitch, just then on the threshold of his brilliant career as Stalin's right-hand man, came there for a week. He was in the prime of life, thick-set, gloriously healthy, and he still wore the small beard, which he afterwards shaved, leaving only a moustache—in the Stalin fashion! He went ski-ing with us and joined us in our games of chess. Seeing him one day playing with a friend of mine, a certain Colonel Soukhoroukov (recently recalled from his post as Military Attaché at Sofia), I thought that the latter was not doing himself justice.

"You're playing like a cobbler, old man," I remarked. Ponderously, Kaganovitch turned his head and said, "D'you think that a cobbler must necessarily be a bad player? I suppose officials of the Department of External Commerce are the only people who know anything about chess?"

I had spoken quite innocently, having no very definite views on the abilities of cobblers, whom I respect as I respect any other kind of manual worker. But I realised at once the extent of my *faux-pas*. Before the Revolution Kaganovitch had been only a little shoemaker in some town of the Volga district. We met several times afterwards and he was careful to let me see, quite good-humouredly, that he had not forgotten my unfortunate comment. . . .

I was struck by the austere beauty of Paris. The colour of her buildings, a product of smoke, fog and old stone, had for me, after the bright tints of Moscow, an effect of noble poetry. The melancholy of the poorer quarters seemed less hopeless than that of our own slums. The impression, no doubt, was purely subjective. At home I found the sight of poverty unendurable because we had achieved the Revolution. Misery after such an event could be only either a reproach or evidence that, for the time being at least, the work of renovation had been checked. But in certain districts of Paris, was not the presence of want big with the possibility of change? But what astonished me most of all was the liberty enjoyed by the Press—the profusion of papers representing all shades of opinion, laying about them in all directions, sparing no one however powerful, and freely upholding the most contradictory and the most subversive doctrines. At that time the Bolshevik Party was frightened of a free Press, and made no bones about it. If the authorities had permitted liberty of expression, even had it been confined to the Socialists, foreign bourgeois influences might have filtered in through that narrow crack, questioning all our values and sapping the foundations of the régime. Paris showed brilliantly that a free Press is not only not a danger, but is actually a condition of security and progress to a ruling class assured of a strong measure of support among the people at large. Luckily I had no time to indulge in doubts or profound reflection. Work was pressing, and work meant constant fighting.

I was appointed sub-director—and, six months later, director—of the Department of Imports of the Commercial Delegation. . . . So few years had passed, and yet how many men had disappeared! When I arrived in Paris the Embassy and the Commercial Delegation had just been completely re-staffed. Dovgalevsky had taken the place of Rakovsky, the old cosmopolitan revolutionary, as ambassador. The Commercial Mission, formerly directed by Piatakov and Boudou Mdivani (both shot in 1937), was now in charge of a former People's Commissar of Finance, Toumanov, and another old Communist, Gourévitch.

In order to get Stalin's adversaries out of Moscow, the Government at that time instituted a plan for sending them on foreign missions, with the result that the Soviet offices in Paris contained about fifty per cent of quasi-Trotskyists. Since those days Toumanov has disappeared in some prison or other, and Gourévitch was recently arrested together with the chief official of the Department of Public Health, Dr. Kaminsky.[1] In 1929 the Trotskyists were still busy prophesying a "Thermidor" which would result in a dictatorship in the Party of Stalin's bureaucrats. They were still determined, however, to support Stalin against Rykov and Bukharin, whom they suspected of wishing to re-establish a form of peasant bourgeois State.

The Commercial Mission was quartered in a huge building at 25 Rue Ville l'Evêque. Its staff consisted of about three hundred persons. The opening stages of the first Five Years' Plan necessitated an enormous amount of work.

The indignant criticisms voiced by the Trotskyist Opposition had forced Stalin to reconsider the whole plan of industrialisation which had been originally laid out on much more modest lines in view of the country's limited resources. Stalin was anxious to outbid his political enemies, and had made large promises. The mutilation of the Party and the state of siege in which the country found itself, could be justified only by some heroic gesture, the results of which would make men forget the bad aspects of his dictatorial actions. His battle against the peasants forced him to undertake, contrary to his original plans, a complete reorganisation of agriculture, to achieve which it was essential to build, with as little delay as possible, huge factories for the production of tractors and agricultural machinery. The Plan was modified every few months by the addition of successive improvisations. The officials of the Party committees and the directors of State enterprises all joined in the game of outbidding one another, and began proposing "super-plans" aiming at an increase of production. The last straw was when it was announced that the Five Years' Plan, already monstrous enough in all conscience, must be completed in four years!

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[1] It is worth noting that Kaminsky, who was principal health officer, and who signed the documents certifying the cause of death in the cases of such Soviet chiefs as Koubychev, Ordjonikidzé, etc., was not called to give evidence before the courts that tried Bukharin, Yagoda, Professor Plethiev and others accused of plotting the murder of Gorky and Koubychev.

The idea was by these means to rouse the enthusiasm of the masses. The Plan threatened to founder in a new welter of anarchy. Costs increased, wastage of labour and of human energy promised to be enormous, but, despite all that, the results obtained would be considerable. I was to get first-hand knowledge of a good many details of this campaign of industrialisation. The following is an example of what I mean by the term "anarchy" as applied to the plan. It serves also to show the psychological motives lying behind the many costly errors that were made, as well as the very real victories that were achieved.

Sérébrovsky, who had made a reputation by his reorganisation of the petrol industry, had just been put in charge of metals. The production of copper had never exceeded forty thousand tons a year. The Central Committee issued a slogan: "One hundred and fifty thousand tons of copper a year for the Socialist State!" The Communist engineer, Chakh-Mouradov, his first assistant, protested against these hopelessly inapplicable instructions.

Any attempt to realise such figures would involve appalling efforts, since it would mean trying to exploit distant seams, for which it would be necessary to establish communications hundreds of kilometres in length, and in fact build up a whole new mining industry. This could not be done under three to four years. The astonishing enthusiasm and energy which had made it possible to create, with amazing speed, such metallurgical giants as Magnitogorsk and Koutznetsk, would merely degenerate into rash adventure and would spell loss of the capital involved and destruction of the machinery concerned—which, indeed, is what happened later. Chakh-Mouradov, an engineer of ability, who had qualified in America, raised his voice against this ruinous policy, but the only result was that he was blamed, accused of being "an opportunist of the Right", charged with wrecking the plans of the Central Committee, and relieved of his post. Realising that he could do nothing, since the question had become one of prestige for the Central Committee, he bowed to the verdict, and admitted that he had been guilty of not understanding the full profundity of the attitude taken by those who directed the policy of the Party. . . . His own proposal had been to bring the annual production of copper to 100,000 tons. This total was held to be insufficient, and Chakh-Mouradov was dismissed. He was given another post somewhere in the provinces, and other engineers, more optimistic, more zealous, or perhaps only less conscientious, took his place.

Sérébrovsky blamed the opportunism of his disgraced companion, and solemnly undertook, in an article which appeared in the *Pravda*, to bring the production of copper in the course of the next year to 150,000 tons. Himself a good engineer and an organiser of great experience, he knew perfectly well that such promises could not be kept, but the Central Committee and its Head insisted on the statement as an example of loyalty and a bowing to discipline. In fact, during the whole progress of the Five Years' Plan, and in spite of every effort, copper production never reached an annual figure of more than 50,000 tons, and it took a very long time to stabilise even this. A certain number of engineers were accused of wrecking and were harshly treated for fruitless and expensive experiments, but the Central Committee did ultimately have the grace to admit responsibility where errors had been committed as the result of obedience to its orders, and Chakh-Mouradov was recalled. . . .

Even supposing that no more is heard of that particular incident, there were others of the same kind later which tended increasingly to end badly for those concerned. No one now can call back to life the technical experts who were shot or who perished in O.G.P.U. labour camps for having allowed their professional self-respect to voice itself in protests. With a man like Chakh-Mouradov professional self-respect was at war with Party loyalty, and it was the latter which eventually carried the day. *Qua* Communist, the man recognised that he had been in the wrong, though as an engineer he knew perfectly well that he was right. He, and others like him, hoped by their work to be able to go on helping their country, and to save its industries even in the teeth of ill-timed adventures planned by ignorant politicians. But all their efforts came to nothing. I have reason to believe that both Sérébrovsky and Chakh-Mouradov, engineers of the highest gifts and qualifications, men experienced in the control of metallurgical enterprises, and known in the industrial circles of two continents, are now in prison as enemies of the people. As to the copper industry, in spite of the enormous sums of money sunk in it, production has never increased beyond the 50,000 mark, the factories are in a state of complete disorganisation, and the machinery has deteriorated or is completely worn out. Tragically for the country, the same situation, or even worse, may be said to exist in all its industries since the purges instituted by Stalin and his lieutenant Ejov.

The psychology common to all of us might, in those days when hope was not entirely dead, have been expressed somewhat in the following way. Stalin's iron fist was hard to bear. His limited intelligence cost the country dear, as did his dictatorial methods. But, in spite of apparently insoluble difficulties, in spite of the fact that each spring the régime seemed to be tottering on its last legs, the man's indomitable energy did succeed in giving the U.S.S.R. a new industrial equipment. After a few more years of intense effort, the results of the terrific, almost superhuman strain, would show themselves in an increase of general prosperity and happiness. In spite of everything, therefore, our devotion to Stalin was coloured with a determined enthusiasm. It was infectious: it penetrated even the ranks of the Opposition. How else explain the frequent surrender of its members? "Stalin's work, cruel and clumsy though his methods of carrying it out may be"—they argued—"is more important than our differences with him"; and they abjured their dissident faith. We none of us had the slightest idea that the moral and political conditions under which Stalin was carrying out his industrialisation plans would completely change the complexion of the finished scheme.

All the activities of the Department of External Commerce were subordinated to the needs of the Five Years' Plan. In every capital of Europe a secret battle was being waged for gold and for credits, and in this I played my part. . . . It was no less bloodthirsty, in its way, than the fighting I had seen in Bokhara against the Mussulman guerrillas. One risked even one's life, for who could tell what would be the result of a mistake? The U.S.S.R. had exhausted her credits and her supplies of valuta and of gold. Nevertheless she played the markets with an air of confidence, though the Treasury was counting its last few banknotes, and the Political Bureau announced, through the medium of the Communist papers of two worlds and through any organ of the Press which happened to be sympathetic, that the Soviet currency was the most stable in the world, that the U.S.S.R. had never yet failed to honour its commitments, and never would. And it is indeed a fact that there is no recorded case of a Soviet bill having been protested. I do know, however, what courage and what luck was needed to save us from the catastrophes that were constantly at our shoulders. Every time a bill fell due we officials of the External Commerce, and our colleagues of the bank, lived through a period of nightmare. The war was waged and won by a single man, to whom his country owes a debt of unlimited gratitude for having saved it, if not from bankruptcy, at least from humiliating and dangerous complications: Rosengoltz, the People's Commissar for External Commerce, Rosengoltz, who was shot as a traitor and a wrecker on the 15th March, 1938. His two deputies, Lioubimov and Weitzer (both outlawed at the moment of writing) were stationed in Berlin where, each day, they acted as a clearing-house for all particulars affecting imports and exports so far as they concerned the vital questions of the receipt of valuta, or the problem of credits and the honouring of any bills that might fall due. Every sum received or paid, no matter how small, was reported over the telephone. Weekly statements, drawn up in great detail, were submitted to Moscow. More than once Moscow had to send urgent deliveries of gold or notes from its last reserves, by aeroplane. The sanction of the Political Bureau could wait until later. Stalin saw Rosengoltz at work; Stalin knew that without Rosengoltz everything would have been lost. . . . Every week, the directors of the different missions working in Paris met in Toumanov's office or Gourévitch's. Gourévitch would smile slyly and begin thus:

"Comrades, the only thing we've really got to bother about is—money. . . ."

We presented our statements of sums paid and of bills to be met in the course of the next day or two. Michael Ostrovsky, ex-Commissar in Boudienny's army and at the War College, the future minister in Bucarest, who was destined to disappear in 1938, was in charge of the Petroleum Export Department. Occasionally he had to appeal to the good nature of "his Capitalists" for an advance on payments. . . . At that time we were exporting everything we could lay our hands on, things for which Russia was starving; nothing was spared, not even the most indispensable food supplies, not even wine, fruit, and poultry, so that in the U.S.S.R. even the sick in the hospitals had to go without. This policy of exporting foodstuffs—at prices so low that they were often less than the cost of production (a factor that nobody considered)—and such primary products as wood and petroleum was one of the causes of the famine that spread to every corner of the country. Everything we had—except food—we had to buy, and most of the money went on industrial machinery.

The attitude adopted by the Germans was intelligent, and in marked contrast to that of the French Capitalists. The Germans were ready to grant us long-term loans of 300 and 400 million marks, while the French either refused long-term transactions altogether, or, when some of their Capitalists did agree to deal, the terms offered were the most unfavourable possible for us. But for the advent of the Hitler régime, Germany would have found herself exercising a very strong economic influence in the U.S.S.R. for many years to come, a situation from which she would have derived great benefits. Russia was creating new industries. If the initial order for machinery was given to Germany, it was a matter of course that the necessary spare parts, the replacements, and the equipment for future factories, would be bought there too, and that the technicians invited to go to Russia to superintend the new plants would be Germans. I was amazed sometimes at the lack of initiative shown by the French in the circumstances, and at the reactionary spirit which led them to ignore so huge a market. We succeeded in doing business in France, but only by paying very dear for what we bought, and only when our credits elsewhere were exhausted. The French industrialist who consented to give us a two years' credit raised his prices in proportion in order to cover the risk, often adding as much as 40 per cent. As a result, a number of Russian business men living exiled in France, knowing that whatever happened, we should honour our bonds, took to discounting our bills at that figure. When the situation improved, the Russian State Bank employed discreet agents to buy up these bills secretly in order to strengthen our financial position, and in this way we managed to recoup ourselves for some of our losses.

Foreigners understood very little of what was happening in Russia. For instance, I was negotiating for the purchase of a quantity of coke furnaces destined for use at Koutznetsk. We asked for delivery in nine months. The director of the French company concerned protested.

"But I've just come back from Koutznetsk!" he exclaimed. "The place is a trackless desert. What *is* the point of taking delivery of stuff which you can't possibly use until the district has been opened up, which won't be for two years at least?"

Actually Stalin's and Yagoda's relentless energy had

[Topical Press

TOMSKY

[France Presse

A. ROSENGOLTZ

thrown into Koutznetsk gangs composed of old Bolsheviks, Komsomols (Young Communists), shock brigades, engineers fired by enthusiasm or terrorised by threats, convicts condemned to forced labour, and, for the unskilled work, expropriated kulaks. These men lived in huts, were fed on black bread and stale cabbage, but the upshot of the effort was that the factory was ready in a year.

The French helped us to develop our aluminium industry, or rather, it would be truer to say that they did not hinder us. I signed with Monsieur Louis Lumière a contract for the building in the U.S.S.R. of a factory for the production of cinematographic films. I bought vine plants for the Crimea and the Caucasus, as well as cork from Algiers, phosphates from Morocco, watches from Switzerland, machinery from Belgium and ore from Luxembourg, spending in this way more than 800 million francs a year.

The French contributed to the creation of the Soviet automobile industry, and played a very large part in building up our aviation service. Toupolèv, the aeroplane designer, the man who was really responsible for setting up our aeroplane factories with their remarkable experimental laboratories, came to Paris with Alksnis. The services rendered by French industry in the early days of Russian aviation were very great. It shared with American manufacturers the honour of making the U.S.S.R. after a few years one of the strongest air powers in the world. . . .

I lived very modestly in Paris, partly because I had never lived otherwise, partly because I sent two-thirds of my salary, which amounted to two hundred dollars a month, to my children in Moscow. The rate of exchange in Moscow had been maintained despite the depreciation of the rouble, and famine had sent prices soaring. This meant that my mother had to pay as much as seven dollars a kilo for the butter she bought for the boys! The Torgsin had not yet come into existence. I occupied an attic in a hotel close to the Place de la Madeleine, and took evening classes at the Arts et Metiers. The affair of Béssédovsky took place while I was travelling in Algiers. Béssédovsky, who was acting as Chargé d'Affaires during the absence of Dovgalevsky, the ambassador, was ordered by a member of the Central Committee of Control to return to Moscow. Having refused to do so, and being threatened with arrest on the premises of the Embassy, he jumped the garden wall which abutted on the Rue de Grenelle and put himself under the protection of the French police.

At home the situation was getting daily worse. Collectivisation, expropriation and deportation of the richer peasants, measures taken against the intellectuals, friction within the Party, a system of bread-cards and a deterioration in the quantity of rations, risings in distant parts of the country—all these things made people uneasy about the future. A number of Soviet officials serving on missions abroad, refused to return. Many of them took posts with foreign firms. Going back to Russia meant giving up a life of comfort, and would necessarily involve rendering an account of their behaviour while out of the country. Corruption played a greater part in leading these men to act as they did than any spirit of political opposition. The Central Committee decided to institute a purge of all foreign Embassies and Commercial Missions.

The Koutépov affair kept us all thoroughly jumpy for six weeks or so. I have no idea what really happened to General Koutépov. If he was spirited away by the O.G.P.U. as the evidence seemed to show, the kidnapping was carried out by some organisation acting entirely on its own initiative, and in no way connected with official

Soviet circles in Paris. We knew nothing whatever about it, and were inclined to believe that the whole affair was staged by our enemies in the hope of making any normal relations with the French authorities more difficult for us. Public opinion saw the O.G.P.U. as the villain of the piece. The Russian emigrés, among whom the general had been a popular figure, were furious. The monarchist paper, *Vozrojdénié*, which was run by a gang of ultra-reactionary journalists without scruple or moderation, worked up military circles among the emigrés to a white heat of indignation. We were warned that there might be an attack on the Embassy. Emigré officers held meetings in the neighbourhood of the Rue de Grenelle. Dovgalevsky declared a state of siege. Most of the Communists were armed and slept at the Embassy. Camp-beds were put up in the larger rooms, and we all took turns at mounting guard. In case of attack we should not have hesitated to defend this scrap of Soviet territory in the heart of Paris which had been entrusted to our care. I remember sleeping in an ante-room on the ground floor with our Secretary of Embassy, Divilkovsky, who had been wounded at Lausanne when Vorovsky had been shot at. He was a nervous creature who slept badly, moaned a good deal, and had a way of starting awake grabbing at his revolver. . . . Dovgalevsky, on the other hand, was a monument of calm self-control, and showed the greatest possible tact in his dealings with French officialdom and the people he met socially in Paris. One evening there was a manifestation under the Embassy windows. The police were noticeable by their absence. I found myself behind the big entrance gate with Dovgalevsky who had come to see that everyone was at his post. We were expecting any monent to see the door broken down, and Dovgalevsky released the safety-catch of his revolver. . . . The monarchist paper accused me of having burned a number of compromising documents. What had actually happened was as follows: While working I had thrown a not quite extinguished cigarette into the waste-paper basket. The basket caught fire, and I took it into the corridor with the intention of holding it under a tap. One of the clerks who deserted to the emigrés, retailed the story with embellishments of his own, and that is how a "sensational revelation" began.

The Purging Commission, under the presidency of Biélenkii, arrived and brought fear into all our hearts. It was making the round of all the capitals of Europe, interrogating without mercy the staffs of the Soviet missions. Private life, amusements, past records, personal origins, contacts, everything was raked up. When, at the meeting at which we were introduced to this commission, an old harsh and domineering militant began to treat us as though we had all been corrupted by the bourgeois influences round us, I lost my temper and answered him without mincing my words. The result was highly unexpected. Through his instrumentality I was shortly afterwards appointed, in a special dispatch from Moscow, as secretary of the Communist cell! Of a hundred Communists who were summoned before the board, only sixteen escaped reprimand, exclusion and recall. . . . Kharin, a former Red professor, who was the secret representative in Paris of the Opposition, chose this moment to betray his companions, and went back to Moscow taking with him a number of documents which had been drawn up by Trotsky's French and Russian friends.

CHAPTER XXI

MOSCOW, PARIS, ITALY, AND BELGIUM

1930–1932

DURING the summer of 1930 I returned to Moscow in order to be present at the XVIth Party Congress to which the Central Committee had invited as guests the secretaries of the three most important Russian Communist cells abroad, those of Berlin, London and Paris. It was borne in on me that one had to have one's Communist convictions pretty deeply ingrained not to be afflicted with doubts. After the improvements of 1922–29, Moscow showed appalling changes. Every face and every house-front was eloquent of misery, exhaustion and apathy. There were scarcely any shops, and the rare display windows that still existed had an air of desolation. There was nothing in them but cardboard boxes and food tins, above which the shopkeepers, in a mood of despair rather than of rashness, had stuck tickets with the words "empty". Everyone's clothes looked worn out, and the quality of the stuff was lamentable. My Paris suit made a sensation in the streets. There was a shortage of everything, even of soap—especially of soap, boots, vegetables, meat, butter, and all fatty foodstuffs. I was much astonished to see crowds waiting in front of the confectioners. People gladly consumed sweets of bad quality, because they were almost the only edible things that could be bought easily and at reasonable prices. Manufactured goods and food were far less common than money, and money than jobs. It was true, as propaganda abroad said, that there was no unemployment, but it was the hardest thing in the world to live off a workman's pay. The housing crisis had reached a pitch never before known. In front of the empty co-operatives, long queues stood day and night in the hope of being doled out ridiculously small quantities of foodstuffs, the quality of which, elsewhere, would have resulted in the man who sold them being held up to public execration and going bankrupt. Contrary to what had been true in the early days of the Revolution, it was the general opinion that conditions were still worse in the country districts than in the big towns.

But struck though I was by these material evidences of crisis, I was still more so by the nervous tension which had resulted from them among the Communists, the intellectuals, the technical specialists and the workmen; in short, among all those who had been most affected by the Five Years' Plan. Faces were marked by anxiety, and minds were so exhausted that no one seemed any longer capable of controlling their reactions or of seeing things calmly. Everyone seemed caught up in a tangle of insistent instructions, unalterable facts, constantly recurring difficulties, official lies, nerve-racking necessities, fears and doubts. I spent a few days at the Central Committee's Rest House at Marino. The careless laughter, the air of youthful gaiety which had struck me on the occasion of my last visit had vanished. I saw nothing around me but sullen looks, heard nothing but cautious talk, was conscious only of men utterly exhausted, incapable of making any further effort, their nerves worn so thin that they were always on the verge of quarrelling and could not endure the slightest contradiction. I made the acquaintance there of a young Marxist professor of Leningrad, named Prigojin, who, while in England, had married the daughter of George Lansbury. He became the director of an Institute of Philosophy and History in Moscow, but was deported with his second wife and their child after the Kirov affair. I am very much afraid that he may have perished with Zinoviev's friends. . . . George Lansbury's daughter, after leaving him, married again, this time Igor Reisner, also a young professor and son of a Russian scholar. He was the brother of Larissa Reisner, about whom I have already had occasion to speak. . . . I should be extremely surprised to hear that Igor Reisner was still living and unmolested.

I remember very little of the XVIth Congress. The rooms and corridors of the Kremlin were crowded. There were endless wearisome ovations which turned the sittings into something very like a series of sporting events. There was not a single serious debate. Stalin delivered a survey of the world situation. He is a bad speaker: his voice is harsh, he has a Georgian accent, uses an aggressive tone, and accompanies his words with jerky movements of the arms. He proclaimed the approaching triumph of Communism in the world at large, and the coming of the German revolution, while throwing in a passing denunciation of the aggressive designs of the French General Staff. I was profoundly distressed, but did not dare to let my dismay appear openly. The worst aspect of the whole thing was the official enthusiasm, the praise, the ovations with which his words were received. It was only too clear that what was being said in no way represented what was being thought—it amounted to no more than a pæan of victory, loud glorification of industrial triumphs, eloquent approval of the "general line", while, in reality, the situation was such that the country was almost at the breaking-point, and everyone was wondering what the morrow would bring.

The Right—Rykov, Bukharin, Tomsky—took the opportunity to speak in condemnation of themselves and to declare their loyalty to the "general line". Defeat hardly describes the impression they made on me: they seemed utterly demoralised, worn out, with no fight left in them, though they might, if they had made the effort, have had the whole country behind them. Tomsky tried to strike a note of dignity when announcing his surrender, by refusing to insist on his own mistakes and on those of his friends. Stalin poked heavy fun at him. Iakovlev (he has since disappeared) read out a report in which he admitted to having organised the destruction of live-stock. . . .

Loyalty to Stalin at this time was conditioned principally by the conviction that there was no one to take his place, that any change of leadership would be extremely dangerous, that the country must continue in its present course, since to stop now or to attempt a retreat, would mean the loss of everything.

I attended a session of the Orgbureau of the Central Committee which was confined to members of the staffs of the Department of External Commerce. Legally, the Organising, is no less important than the Political, Bureau. Between them they are supposed to share the various problems of administration and policy. The Orgbureau was made up of five secretaries of the Central Committee, headed by Stalin, the secretary of the Trades Unions, and the secretary of the Youth Movement. Gamarnik represented the Army. Kaganovitch presided. Alexander Petrovitch Smirnov, formerly People's Commissar for Agriculture, a veteran of the Party and respected by all, was present as fifth secretary. Owing, however, to his connection with the Right, he no longer occupied a role of any importance (he disappeared ultimately with the other members of the Right). The *rapporteur*, a man named Kissis, Rosengoltz's deputy, had spent two months preparing a detailed document on the personnel of all the missions abroad, and on the causes of the new wave of emigration. Kaganovitch allowed him six minutes in which to present it! Other speakers had to be content with two; some were never allowed on the platform at all.

Rosengoltz, quite recently appointed, still young-looking and dressed in tunic and boots of pseudo-military cut, read a list of colleagues whom he wanted to work with him in the Department. Kaganovitch appeared to be shocked by such audacity and merely said: "We will go into that together." The final decision was his—to reduce all Soviet personnel abroad by 50 per cent, and to send on foreign missions two hundred proved Communists. When I left the meeting I saw clearly what the situation was. There was no longer any discussion on matters of importance, nothing but a mere pretence for the sake of appearances. Power was entirely in the hands of the men who were in Stalin's confidence.

When I returned to Paris I had been promoted. I was now assistant Commercial Representative and Director-General of Imports. The conditions under which we worked, far from improving, had got worse. The decisions of the French courts would have made existence impossible for us if means had not been discovered of getting round them. Former owners of ships nationalised during the Revolution and now flying the Soviet flag, had obtained judgments entitling them to seize moneys, property and stock belonging to the Department of Commerce. Dovgalevsky's protests, however, did have the effect of keeping the bailiffs from entering our premises. Goods, funds, and payments were passed to us through the intervention of third persons, and, as a rule, were consigned to the address of some mixed company of which the U.S.S.R. held the majority of shares.

Dovgalevsky's personal gifts were daily put to the test. Speaking French perfectly, and familiar with the habits and the psychology of the country—he had lived in France as a student—the ambassador distinguished himself by his firmness, his patience, his courtesy, and the subtlety that for ever lurked behind a dignified exterior.

He could have passed anywhere for a great French engineer, which, indeed by training he was. No one was better suited to carry on the struggle for Soviet influence, and he ended by more or less winning the day. By the time he died at his post, the situation had greatly improved. He was a man of quiet tastes with a love of literature and the arts. We sometimes used to sit down to a game of poker, Mourodian, president of the Soviet Bank in Paris, Ostrovsky of the Petroleum Trust, he and I. . . . Mourodian is probably in prison or in some concentration camp, since he was assistant to Arkus, of whom I have already spoken, who perished at the time of the Zinoviev trial, refusing to the last to plead guilty of crimes which he had not committed. Ostrovsky has disappeared, Dovgalevsky is no longer alive. . . .

We were occasionally joined in the Embassy drawing-room by another veteran of the Revolution, whose fate I am about to recount because it was so characteristic of the times. Nicholas Kouzmin, Consul-General in Paris, had been a doctor before 1917. He had commanded the Red Army which had operated in the White Sea district and had finally driven from Archangel the Whites (under General Miller) and the English. . . . As a member of the Revolutionary Council of the army in Petrograd, he had been imprisoned in 1921 by the Kronstadt rebels. As a former emigré he longed to revisit his old haunts, Montparnasse and Montmartre, and the Party appointed him to the post on which he had set his heart. Merely to breathe the air of Paris was for him an unending pleasure. But on one of his visits to Moscow he was foolish enough to complain in Voroshilov's hearing of having to live as an exile in a bourgeois country. Such remarks were thought proper in Bolshevik circles. A few weeks later I saw him open a telegram, the contents of which appeared to flatten him out completely. Voroshilov, in the belief that he was doing him a good turn, had wired the news that he had just been appointed to a military post in eastern Siberia. Kouzmin put a good face on this piece of ill-luck and returned to Russia. After the Rotonde, Irkutsk or Krasnoyarsk was too great a contrast! In his distant command he got mixed up in an unfortunate affair with a woman. He was sent to Archangel to direct the *Glavsevmorpout*, or Arctic shipping line. A short time afterwards the ice-breaker *Sibiriakov* was smashed to pieces on an ice-floe. In 1936 and 1937 this disaster was remembered against him because, during the Civil War, he had been one of Zinoviev's collaborators. And so it came about that poor old Kouzmin, an honest Bolshevik if ever there was one, and the most disinterested of frenchified Russians, was declared an "enemy of the people". . . . What, I wonder, was his end, or what sort of an end is he headed for?

As I found it impossible to work with the temporary head of the Commercial Mission in Paris, a man called Breslav, Rosengoltz had me appointed Commercial Agent in Brussels. But Belgium had not yet recognised us and it took an age for me to get the necessary visas. While waiting for them to come through, I was seconded to serve on the staff of Levinson, our representative in Italy, whose headquarters were at Milan. I became at once involved in Soviet affairs in Italy, being appointed Director of Imports as soon as I arrived. Levinson sent me to arrange for the immediate purchase of five million lemons in Sicily. My presence at Palermo and Messina, though no one was supposed to know the object of my journey, had the effect of sending the price of lemons up by 20 per cent! I was flattered, and considerably embarrassed. I knew nothing whatever about the market value of this acid fruit, but decided to study at my leisure the figures of purchases made during the last few years.

With this object I retired, in the guise of a tourist seeking quiet, to a pretty little bay. As soon as the exporters were convinced that I wasn't bothering my head about them they began to hunt me out. Prices once more became normal, and I even managed to strike a pretty good bargain by dint of a fair amount of picturesque haggling. I spoke no Italian, and if the merchants of Messina thought that the language they produced, to an accompaniment of heated gesticulation, was French, they were very much mistaken. . . . Still, we got on perfectly.

Fascist Italy showed itself well disposed towards the U.S.S.R. In the course of the first Five Years' Plan it received a number of important orders. The firms concerned allowed us long credits guaranteed by the State, quoted us very reasonable prices—a good deal lower than those of their French and English competitors—and supplied us with first-rate machinery. The Soviet technicians came to the conclusion that Italy, which they had always considered to be industrially a backward nation, had made enormous strides since the war, and was now an industrial country boasting, in more than one department, the most up-to-date equipment.

We bought Fiat cars, aero-engines, dockyard plant, and ships. At Venice, Genoa and Trieste, the naval yards executed a quantity of Soviet orders. I travelled all over the country and met several of the leaders of Italian industry. I had to negotiate the purchase of a number of ships with the old Admiral Ciano. We were offered credits of three years: we wanted five. The business might have been satisfactorily concluded but for the fact that Loganovsky arrived from Moscow with even stricter instructions. My dealings with Senator Agnelli of the Fiat works, and with Signor Benni of the Electrotechnical industry, were more successful. Unfortunately the Germans had more or less monopolised the Russian market so that there was nothing much we could do in Italy. I worked so hard during this time that I had no opportunity of visiting the great art centres, the museums or the countryside. . . . The most exciting thing I saw were the great air manœuvres at Milan (1931) in which hundreds of machines took part, divided into a numerically smaller attacking force and a markedly superior defence. Three hundred "enemy" aeroplanes attacked the city in pitch darkness, broke through the defending lines, and bombarded Milan with flares. It was a magnificent spectacle, but the thoughts it suggested were depressing. It was clear that in matters of aviation the attacker was in a dangerously superior position. In spite of an admirably organised defence, the city, under conditions of real warfare, would have suffered terribly.

Moscow sent the Communist engineer Pouchin to ask my advice in the matter of purchasing a quantity of machinery. He was a young and very energetic man, at that time occupied, under instructions from Piatakov, in equipping our growing chemical industry. I came on his name among the list of the sixteen men cited, in 1936, at the Zinoviev trial. He was shot.

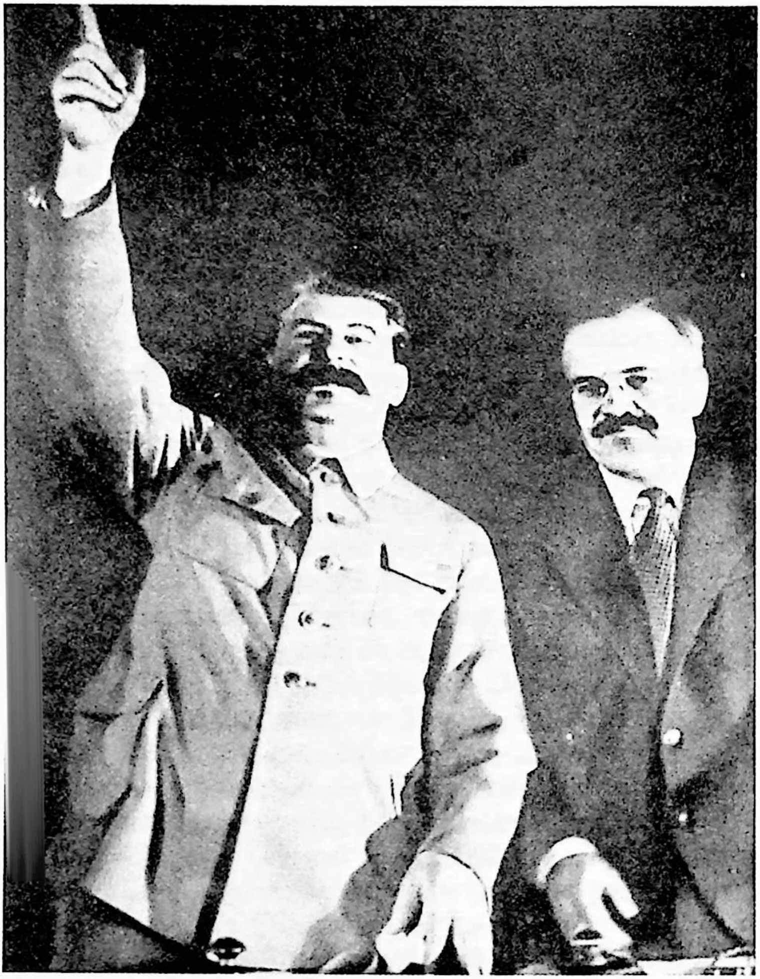
My two sons had been placed, at my request, in a model school just outside Moscow. A friend went to see them there and wrote me an alarming letter. The air was good, certainly, and the place was situated among pine woods, but the children were kept hungry, swore like troopers, and played games with knives. The older boys, too, became very early initiated into forbidden pleasures. . . . My trip to Moscow had enlightened me on the subject of real conditions in Russia (the official Press and the "friendly" papers of foreign countries never tired of describing it as a happy land where there was no unemployment and where the general standard of living was growing progressively better). I made up my mind that

Boris and Choura, now almost eight years old, should join me. What puny little creatures they looked in the wretched clothes that had been all they could get during the hard years of the Plan. When they went into the station restaurant at Vienna with the woman friend who had travelled with them, they were thunderstruck at the sight of food such as they had never even dreamed of in the whole course of their young lives. One of them had voiced his amazement in a question: "Have they finished their five years' plan here? Is that why they've got everything?"

My Belgian visa eventually came through, and I left Milan for Brussels. The Belgian authorities, determined to ignore the U.S.S.R. as far as possible, had refused to stamp my diplomatic passport, and had given me a visa on a separate sheet. It permitted me to remain in the country one month, and was renewable. I could, while in Belgium, occupy no official position. I could have only a private office, and could conduct dealings only as a private individual. The banks and the most important industrial firms boycotted us. This obstinate hostility was to be explained by the losses suffered by Belgian concerns in Russia during the Revolution. Several of these insisted on retaining their nominal rights in a number of Soviet enterprises. A friend showed me an annual report issued in 1931 by a metallurgical company which announced to its shareholders that "our inspectors were unable to visit the factories at Iouzovo owing to their being temporarily occupied by the Bolsheviks. . . ."—which to me smacked of a certain type of American humour. Nevertheless the Belgians did buy from us both minerals and wood, for business is business. They bought also butter and tinned fish, both of which we sold cheap. The ministers refused to have anything to do with me. Some Belgians, moving in political circles, realising the absurdity of the situation, agreed to act as intermediaries between the Soviet Commercial Agent, who was legally not recognised, and the Government. One of the deputies wrote to Monsieur Hymans, the Foreign Minister, to know whether Soviet ships entering Antwerp harbour ran any risk of being sequestrated as the shareholders of certain concerns had suggested they should be. Monsieur Hymans assured us that there was no danger, but his reply was addressed not to us but to his colleague.

Two new friends whom I made at Brussels, the Socialist deputies Wauters and Piérard, helped me to get into touch again with a former acquaintance, the charming doctor with whom I had travelled from Athens to Naples, Dr. Van der Ginst, and we took up again at his table, with the addition of his Socialist friend Dr. Marteaux, the political discussions which we had begun in the Mediterranean. Both of us had, to some extent, changed. The Belgian, impressed by the success of the Five Years' Plan—of which he knew neither the seamy side nor the cost—seemed almost ready, I thought, to agree when I maintained that Bolshevik violence, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Stalin's energy and strict methods of repression, were showing fruit. Was not one of the most backward countries in the world becoming transformed under our eyes into a Socialist industrial power? But while I argued along these lines I was the prey to interior doubts. I had before my eyes the picture of Moscow sucked dry, rationed, ground down by hard necessity and the still harder discipline of the Party. I remembered my two boys threatened with anæmia and thoroughly devitalised as a result of the privations which they had endured, and I began, deep in myself, to wonder whether we were not paying too dearly in suffering and exhaustion for our industrial victories, and what would be the ultimate political consequences. It may be that my companions have forgotten all that was said at our discussions. I, however, looking back, seem to see in them the first indications of that curious "general post" which has led, in the presence of the evolution, at first morbid then monstrous, of Stalinism, to the old warriors of the Revolution, with a sense of death in their hearts, feeling entirely divorced in sympathy from the dictator and his army of bureaucrats; while the Reformists, the Moderates, the Liberals, imperfectly and badly informed, after having been the relentless adversaries of the Revolution in the days of its greatness, now permit themselves to be seduced into enthusiasm by the successes, or the pretended successes, of the totalitarian ideal. . . . It should be remembered that in 1932 the Germany of the Weimar Constitution was in the throes of a mortal illness for which Reformist Socialists could find no cure, while the U.S.S.R. was straining every nerve to construct its industrial future.

I signed contracts for the sale to Belgium of asbestos and manganese. Timber exports reached such high figures that I was given an assistant, who worked with the title of Director of the Timber Department. He was a young man, ignorant of French, of trade matters in general and of the timber trade in particular, a great talker with a fine conceit of himself, named Erchov. He had acted as propagandist for some local committee of the party. . . . I soon discovered why this odd appointment had been made. Erchov was the personal protégé of Zikhon, the Commissar of Labour (his name is never heard now), whom he kept in linen, toilet articles, etc., sending home his consignments by the diplomatic bag. The more open criticism was repressed, the more did favouritism flourish. There was a good deal of talk, it is true, about internal criticism, but if it existed it worked only one way and was directed solely against junior officials saddled with the task of carrying out the plans of



[*Planet News*

STALIN AND MOLOTOV

their chiefs. Its main use was in furnishing scapegoats for official chastisement. I cannot do better, while on this subject, than quote two edifying examples of what I have been talking about. Asmus was appointed Soviet minister at Helsinki for no other reason than that he had shown Vienna (where he was Secretary of Embassy) to Kaganovitch, who had gone there to consult one of the leading doctors. Litvinov was intending to make him a consul somewhere or other, and the order from the Political Bureau giving him the Helsinki post came as a very great surprise. . . . Michael Ostrovsky had let himself be bluffed while in Paris by some men of straw put up by a group of Russian emigrés. He sold them timber on terms that meant a loss of several hundred thousand gold roubles. Rosengoltz drew up an adverse report on his conduct and submitted it, with supporting documents, to the Party Commission of Control. Meanwhile, Ostrovsky, who was a protégé of Voroshilov, was given by the *Politbureau* the post of ambassador in Bucarest, and the Commission of Control found itself powerless. But in 1937 Ejov got rid of both protégés—Kaganovitch's and Voroshilov's—a fact that is not without its significance.

The Belgians allowed us no credits; consequently, we bought very little from them, considerably less than they bought from us. Their trade-balance with the U.S.S.R. was not favourable. Such details, however, seemed to mean nothing at all to them. I have often observed that a reactionary temperament alone will induce men of business to consent deliberately to a loss of trade. Since it was impossible for the U.S.S.R. to have an official representative in Belgium, I played with the idea of starting a joint-stock company operating with both Soviet and Belgian capital, or, at least, counting a number of Belgians among its shareholders. Such a society did actually come into being some time later after my departure from Brussels, which was accompanied by several incidents comic as well as irritating.

I had settled my children in a *pension* on the Belgian coast. I had to make trips first to London and then to Paris. London attracted me. My reading of the English novelists, most of whom were translated into Russian and had been very popular with the boys of my generation, had given me a preconceived idea of England, in which the names of Dickens and Kipling, and the thought of poverty, hypocrisy, order, tradition, a certain kind of good nature and a magnificence unlike anything I had ever known, played an almost equal part. Despite the fact that I had been all over Europe, my first sight of the white cliffs gave me a genuinely emotional thrill. I lost myself in the maelstrom of the largest capital of the old world, and saw that all sorts and conditions floated on its waters, very good as well as very bad, and that what was most noticeable about these people was a strong sense of discipline in which respect for the rights of the individual played a predominant part.

It was in the train between Brussels and Liége that I heard the news of the assassination of President Doumer by a Russian. A Russian? We Soviet officials abroad were so used to suspicion and ill-will—to actual misrepresentation, too, as we had had occasion to see in the matter of certain campaigns conducted by hostile newspapers—that my mind instantly began to consider possible complications. I broke off my journey and returned to Brussels in order to be ready for whatever might happen. As I expected, the journalists of the Right immediately accused the Communists and denounced their relations with the Soviets. They were considerably put out of countenance when it was announced next day that Gorgoulov was a sort of Fascist lunatic or lunatic Fascist. Some friends told me that the Soviet Embassy in Paris had felt much as I had done, and had put itself into a state of defence, mounting sentries, as it always did when there was any chance of disturbance.

I was not wrong in assuming ill-will towards me on the part of the general public and of the Belgian authorities. I was soon to have proof of it. Coming back from Paris by road, I found that my office and my flat had literally been turned upside down. There is something peculiarly sad and revolting about the sight of a private dwelling that has been made the scene of physical brutality. Everything, no matter how trivial, had been flung about and trampled under foot. Empty drawers stood wide open; my official ledgers had been removed; my clothes and personal papers lay all over the floor, and the locks of my trunks had been forced. Several letters and photographs were missing. The safe was adorned with enormous seals. A complete search had been carried out in my absence. I found a note requesting my immediate presence at police headquarters, and went there at once. An inspector received me very impolitely in a room situated on the ground floor of the Palais de Justice. I noticed that he carefully refrained from offering me a seat. I went up to an armchair and settled myself into it comfortably before protesting against the housebreaking and looting to which I had been subjected.

The interview opened on a note of strain.

"By employing the word housebreaking," barked the inspector, "you are insulting my men, who were merely carrying out their orders."

"I have no wish to be rude to your men, Inspector," I replied, "but it is no good pretending that my first impression was not that a very clumsy burglary had taken place. It was only later that I realised that I had been made the victim of an illegal act of search carried out with quite unnecessary brutality. Since we are living in a civilised country, may I point out to you that there is such a thing as individual liberty."

I began to see light when I learned that the order of search had been issued by the Public Prosecutor of Mons, a city in Hainault which I had never visited, and where I had no friends and no correspondents. Hainault at that time was the scene of a strike of miners which had been marked by several dramatic incidents. The miners had greeted Vandervelde with cat-calls, thrown several police officers into the canal, and locked a number of engineers and mine managers into their offices. . . . Who was behind these excesses? Apparently it never occurred to anyone that the miners themselves might be sufficiently discontented and overwrought to resort spontaneously to violence. No, there happened to be at Brussels an official Bolshevik agent who pretended to be concerned only with matters of business, whereas in reality he doubtless spent his nights manipulating invisible threads which set in motion the unionists and rioters of the mining districts! That, anyhow, was how the magistrate's mind had worked, and for this reason, or rather for this absence of reason, he had felt himself justified in ordering a search of my premises. My protest infuriated the inspector and convinced him that everything pointed to my being a dangerous agent of the Komintern. While I was waiting in a neighbouring room for my personal belongings to be returned to me, I happened to put my hand into my pocket for a cigarette. Immediately a number of policemen made as though to fling themselves on me. It was necessary for them to come back with me in order to remove the seals from my safe and to give me access to my flat, which they had imagined to contain such dangerous secrets. I refused to take them in my car, and, still more naturally, to get into theirs, which happened to be a prison van. . . . "All right," I said, "let's each go in our own cars." "Quite impossible; we must not let you out of our sight." "Am I to consider myself under arrest, then?" "Nothing of the sort—but the law forbids us to leave you until the seals shall have been removed from your safe." "Well, then, if I am not your prisoner, I'm afraid you must consider yourselves as mine!" and we compromised by making the journey in a tram-car.

My safe had been completely empty ever since the Gorgoulov affair. The police found that a bit thick! I suppose the Public Prosecutor had imagined he was on the track of some gigantic plot. Obviously, I must have managed to empty the safe just after—or just before—the seals had been attached. A damned clever trick!

Moscow, informed of what had happened, told me to return and make a detailed report. A political friend of mine, a member of the Left, a lawyer who later became a minister in Van Zeeland's cabinet, offered me his advice. I was, at the time, giving all my attention to the establishment of a commercial line between Leningrad and Antwerp. In spite of the importance of the scheme, the Belgian Government, in the teeth of my lawyer's representations, refused to give me a visa for my return which would be valid for more than a month. I knew that the police inspector with whom I had had dealings had submitted a detailed report in which he had made a great point of the Bolshevik insolence of my attitude. "Police headquarters have got it in for you," said my Belgian friends.

"Because of the Hainault strikes, I suppose?"

"Probably, but more particularly because you pulled their legs. They were pretty sure you were up to something!"

I left my children near Blankenberghe and went back to Moscow. A committee of the Department of External

Commerce, presided over by Froumkin, approved my project for a line between Leningrad and Antwerp, and I at once started back. As there was no Belgian consulate in Moscow, I had to get my visa in Berlin. The Belgian Consul-General in Berlin explained with an air of considerable embarrassment that he had received categorical instructions on the subject, and that I was forbidden to cross the Belgian frontier. "I'm sorry, but it is quite impossible." My two boys were treated with all the honours of war. Their departure resembled an exchange of prisoners. An official of the Soviet Commercial Delegation in Paris was sent to Belgium to conduct them to the German frontier where I was to meet them. . . . I have since learned more or less what lay behind all this comic business. A former agent of the O.G.P.U., Agabekov, who had fled to Belgium after employing on various jobs of counter-espionage the organisation which he had controlled in the Levant, had become principal police informer in all matters connected with the Soviets. What he didn't know he invented, and blackmail played a considerable part in his methods. In order to get paid for services rendered, he invented a completely bogus O.G.P.U. system which was supposed to be working abroad.

Three years later the Belgian Government was to recognise the U.S.S.R., send an ambassador to Moscow, and receive a Commercial Delegation in Brussels. In 1937 the Belgian diplomats stationed in Athens paid me many friendly visits. We talked together of the beauties of Bruges and Ghent, and even of the architecture of the magnificent Palais de Justice in Brussels, though naturally I spared the feelings of my colleagues and guests by never referring to my intimate knowledge of the latter building. In this way the winds of politics veer, and navigators in those seas know how changeable they are.

I have only one thing more to say. While the Soviets were poor and revolutionary their intervention in the Labour movement was greatly exaggerated. The Communist International had its own channels of communication with Moscow, the O.G.P.U. ran its private secret service, the diplomatic and commercial agents of Russia worked within strictly limited fields—and while the journalists continued to discredit them and hold them up as objects of suspicion, the real agents of propaganda and penetration abroad were able to carry on their work unhindered. . . . On the other hand, since, after becoming a member of the League of Nations, the U.S.S.R. has entered the comity of Western Powers, richer than it ever was before, now that its production of gold has assumed such significant proportions, and less careful than it was of the means it employs to extend its influence—for Stalin's régime is based on no Socialist basis—foreigners have more than once preferred to shut their eyes to what was going on. The O.G.P.U. has been able to organise in Paris a murder which was in fact committed in Switzerland. In more than one country Stalin's Government has succeeded in "colonising"—to use a term that has now become generally recognised—the Trades Unions. In Belgium it has the semi-official representatives on the General Council of the Labour Party.

CHAPTER XXII

THE U.S.S.R. AFTER FIVE YEARS OF INDUSTRIALISATION

ON my return to Moscow in November 1932, I was appointed vice-president of the Machine-tools Importation Trust, the *Stankoimport*, which imported equipment bought all over the world for the use of our new automobile, aeroplane and machine factories.

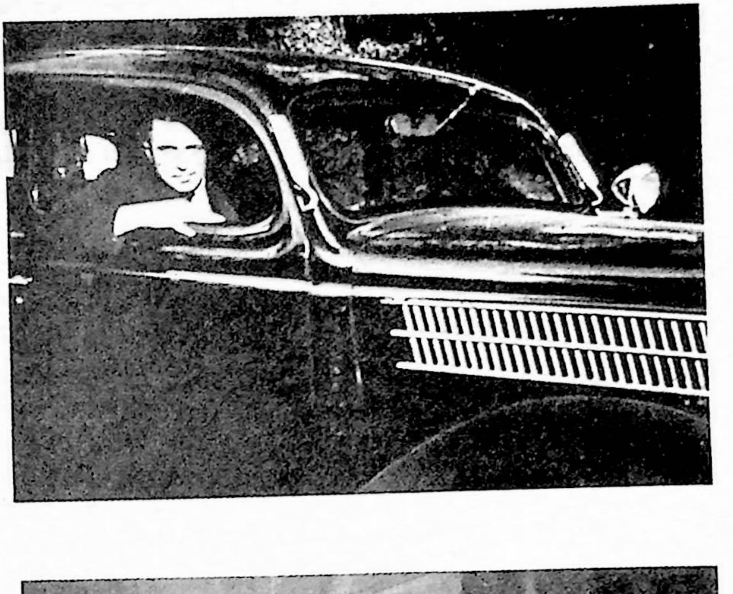
The appearance of Moscow had undergone many changes, but it took me some time, spending my days among them, to realise how deep they went. Striking and even tragic as they might be, however, it was only by being in the country and living as the peasants lived, that one could understand fully how the achievement of even the simplest standard of existence had become a matter of triumphant management and never-ceasing anxiety.

The Ukraine and several of the more distant provinces were in the throes of famine. Drought had nothing to do with it. Food shortage was due entirely to the breakdown of agriculture caused by collectivisation, and by the policy of maximum exports. In the cities there was also famine, but there the whole business was organised from top to bottom, with food-cards, categorised rations, shops reserved for those belonging to certain concerns or employed in the Commissariats, and the Torgsins. In the special stores the privileged—that is to say the specialists and the high officials—could obtain with great difficulty and in small quantities such things as foodstuffs, drugs and clothes. But in the Torgsins—i.e. the branches of the Society for Trade Dealings with Foreigners—though, in fact, they were patronised only by Soviet citizens since foreigners were few and far between—anyone could buy anything provided he paid for it in gold, other precious metals, jewels, or valuta received from abroad. The Torgsin accepted dental plates, ikons of silver, watches, wedding-rings, spoons, and even copper currency from China and the Argentine, and one could find there such rare objects as boots, dress-material, pyramidon, tea, chocolate and soap. . . . It is only fair to add that if anyone denounced you as being the possessor of a wedding-ring, a watch or a pair of gold ear-rings, the O.G.P.U. proceeded to arrest you and kept you under arrest until you consented to hand over with a good grace these various precious possessions—without compensation of any sort beyond the recovery of your liberty. Money was soon to regain its value with the opening of a number of State shops and "commercial" co-operatives, so called because various articles and foods were sold there at fabulous prices corresponding with those obtaining in the open market, about thirty to forty times higher than those of the period before the first Five Years' Plan.

An exceedingly small number of persons, consisting exclusively of high and very high officials, foreigners and extremely important specialists, was able to frequent the good hotels with restaurants of the type made familiar by the "Palaces" all over the world, orchestras and bars. Supper for one person at the Metropole cost two months' salary of a small clerk. I was being paid five times that, 500 roubles a month, that is, the wage of a "bureaucrat", of a high official, and the Department of External Commerce, thanks to the influence of Rosengoltz, guaranteed me a room at the Hotel Novo-Moslovsky in the centre of the city. The Department paid my rent—30 roubles a day (I couldn't possibly have afforded it myself). The problem of food was, for me, a very complicated one. In the hotel restaurant a bowl of soup cost

6 to 7 roubles, a plate of meat 22 roubles, a glass of tea 1 rouble. I had to feed my two boys and the nurse who looked after them. At this rate of living I should have got through my month's pay in three or four days. To get a bread-card meant weeks and months occupied in formalities. How could I manage to live? I sold my Buick to the Torgsin, not without having a great deal of difficulty before I could obtain the necessary authorisation. I got for it 500 Torgsin-roubles, each one of which was worth in the open market, where they were the object of wild speculation, about 40 paper roubles. We lived off this money for a year and a half. At the hotel we were strictly forbidden to do any cooking in our rooms. The nurse prepared our food, therefore, in secret, in a little windowless recess. If the Primus stove roared the manager came up threatening to put us into the street at once. At the end of eight months of living like this I got a flat in a hostel for officials of the Department of External Commerce. Naturally, my two rooms had been fought over by about ten officials, all as tiresomely situated as I was, and all pleading special rights, peculiar circumstances, powerful patronage or reasons of State. Rosengoltz snatched the morsel out of their greedy mouths, and gave it to me, for he had been in the war and did things with a certain military directness.

My Buick, before being turned into food and shelter, served to enlighten me on certain results of the policy of industrialisation. Of these I knew only what the official Press told me, and, on the whole, I had more or less believed what was printed there. I realised that our motor industry was young and our road system pretty bad, but I had gathered that in this field, as in others, we were making immense progress—"overtaking with giant strides the most advanced of our neighbours. . . ." I had promised myself a motor trip through at least the



ATHENS TO MOSCOW, DECEMBER 1936

central parts of the Union. A friend, as keen as myself on motoring, went with me to Leningrad to take delivery of his own car which was coming on the same boat as mine. Our hearts were beating as we watched the cranes depositing on the Leningrad quay our two elegantly shaped Buicks, which stood out in such pleasant contrast to the old Fords with which most officials had to be contented. But almost at once came our first disappointment: the cars were delivered to us completely stripped, I might almost say gutted, of every accessory. Everything worth stealing had been stolen on board the Soviet ship.

It was a fine, cold day, 15 to 20 degrees below zero, with bright sunshine and crisp, gentle snow. To send our cars on to Moscow and make the journey ourselves by train would have appeared to us an act of sacrilege, an unpardonable lack of confidence in our country and its government. Everyone knows that since the days of Alexander I, that is to say for more than a century, the Petersburg–Moscow road has been one of the best in all Russia. Running in an almost straight line between the two capitals, and maintained with the greatest care, it was the apple of the eye of the Department of Roads and Bridges under the Imperial régime. Let us take that road! The landscape might be melancholy, the fields and woods smothered in snow, but at least we should have the joy of arriving in Moscow like true Europeans. The distance is about 650 kilometres. We could do that in ten or twelve hours driving time, without pressing.

We had first to get a card entitling us to buy petrol. We made the necessary representations to the administration of the Road and Car Society, the *Avtodor*, to the Petrol Rationing Board, and to the committee of the Party, in the hope that we might be able to hasten the formalities. The business was completed in two days, for we both held high positions. The petrol-card gave us the right to replenish our tanks anywhere in the Union without the need of further explanations.

We were in high good humour when we took the road. The first two hundred and fifty kilometres passed pleasantly enough against a background of trackless snow and a mildly Arctic landscape. From time to time we passed lorries standing motionless by the·roadside, some empty, some full. There was never any sign of their drivers. The heavy vehicles stood there solitary on the white road, and looking oddly abandoned. The sight was an odd one and pricked our curiosity. The farther we got from Leningrad and the nearer to the half-way point, the more numerous became these lorries, until at times it seemed as though whole caravans had been abandoned by the roadside. It was only very occasionally that we met one on the move, and when we did so we noticed that the driver looked at us with an expression of surprise mingled with respect. At last we had to begin thinking about refilling our tanks. We would do it at the next large market town, a traffic centre of importance, the point of convergence of a number of roads linking up the various big townships of the ancient Government of Tver.

Where should we find petrol in this little town dozing in the sunlight despite the fact that the thermometer was down to 27 degrees? We went into a bar. Some motor drivers seated at a table gave us an ironic glance when we put our question to them. "Petrol, Comrades? We've been waiting for petrol for two days. There's not a drop anywhere along the road. Didn't you see all the breakdowns?" We looked at one another in amazement, since we had been led to believe that the U.S.S.R. came second only to the U.S.A. as an oil-producing country. We should have to look into that mystery later; but what was to be done to solve the immediate difficulty? We went through a bad quarter of an hour cudgelling our brains;

then my friend had a brilliant inspiration. "There must be a few chemists in this one-horse place. Let's buy up all the crude benzine they've got. . . ." We went through that town with a small tooth-comb, putting our case to every keeper of a drug-store we could find. They were obviously a bit frightened when they found out that we were Directors of the Department of External Commerce, and we came back to our cars with several litres of benzine. We started off again under the surprised gaze of the immobilised drivers. It wasn't that they thought us adepts in black magic, but only that they assumed that the O.G.P.U.—the only people likely still to have a few spare tins—had got us out of our difficulties because we happened to be, so to speak, "in the trade". We counted on being able to fill up again nearer Moscow.

As a result of the delay there was no longer any question of getting home that evening: we should have to spend the night somewhere. This new problem was hardly less difficult than the former. Hotels on the road are unknown, and the few inns were already crammed with carters, lorry-drivers, local officials and peasants. The "parlours" were suffocating, and the best the manager could offer in the way of accommodation was beds in the living-room, with sheets, to be sure, but sheets which had already been used by someone else and could not be changed because they only "did their washing" once a month. Sleeping in the cars meant risking death from the cold. . . .

Next day our drug-store benzine got us on another hundred kilometres and then gave out. We realised with horror that we still had about three hundred to go. The white ribbon of the road stretched endlessly before us. The abandoned lorries which we passed at long intervals reminded us of an army in retreat. The snow had covered them so completely that several of them were scarcely visible. At every village, at every filling-station, we made the same inquiry, always without effect. There was no petrol to be had. We began to hate the sight of those cards which gave us permission to replenish our tanks "anywhere in Russia". Wouldn't it have been simpler to have told us that there was no petrol to be had anywhere between Leningrad and Moscow—after five years of triumphant industrialisation?—or rather that the filling-stations were there but all bone dry? "Does this often happen?" we asked. "It's very remarkable when it doesn't", was the answer. We had seen for ourselves in Moscow hundreds of persons standing in a queue in the hope of buying a few litres; we knew that petrol was being sold on the "secret" market at four or five times its official price; but we had thought that those in charge of the Plan would at least have provided for the needs of those travelling on State business or in connexion with the Co-operatives. All these broken-down lorries meant a complete disorganisation of labour and a failure to move food about over whole districts of the country

We spent a second night at a filling-station. Whatever happened we'd got to get to Moscow somehow! "Petroleum?" I queried, for my eye had caught sight of a tank. The risk was considerable, but we had to take it. We trembled with apprehension as we fed our cars, used to the refined product of Shell, with the awful stuff used for local running, black, greasy, crude oil, full of foreign bodies. . . . Surely our engines would never be able to digest such fuel! But they did. To an accompaniment of much banging, backfiring, groaning and jerking, many stoppages and explosions, we got off. The road was a road now only by courtesy. Ruts of frozen snow alternated with stretches of ice. There were quite unaccountable holes and lumps in its surface. Our springs broke. We got them mended in a rough-and-ready way at a village smithy. We were frozen and exhausted; we both had streaming colds. My companion went to sleep as he drove, very nearly turned his car over in a stream, and got a nasty jab in the ribs from the wheel which was considerably damaged in the process! We might have been conducting a retreat from Russia—by car. At last, at Tver, we managed to get some petrol. Victory!

Ill-luck pursued me even to Moscow. Just outside the city, near the race-course, the road became a perfect modern speedway. Who could have suspected a catch? Those who used the route regularly knew what to avoid. I, unfortunately, was a stranger. A drain somewhere near-by had burst, and water, as a result of running for some considerable time over the snow, had flooded the slope, turning it into a sheet of ice as smooth as a mirror. I saw it only when it was too late. The Buick dashed downhill, cut a young tree in two, and fetched up against a second, smashed and at the end of its tether.

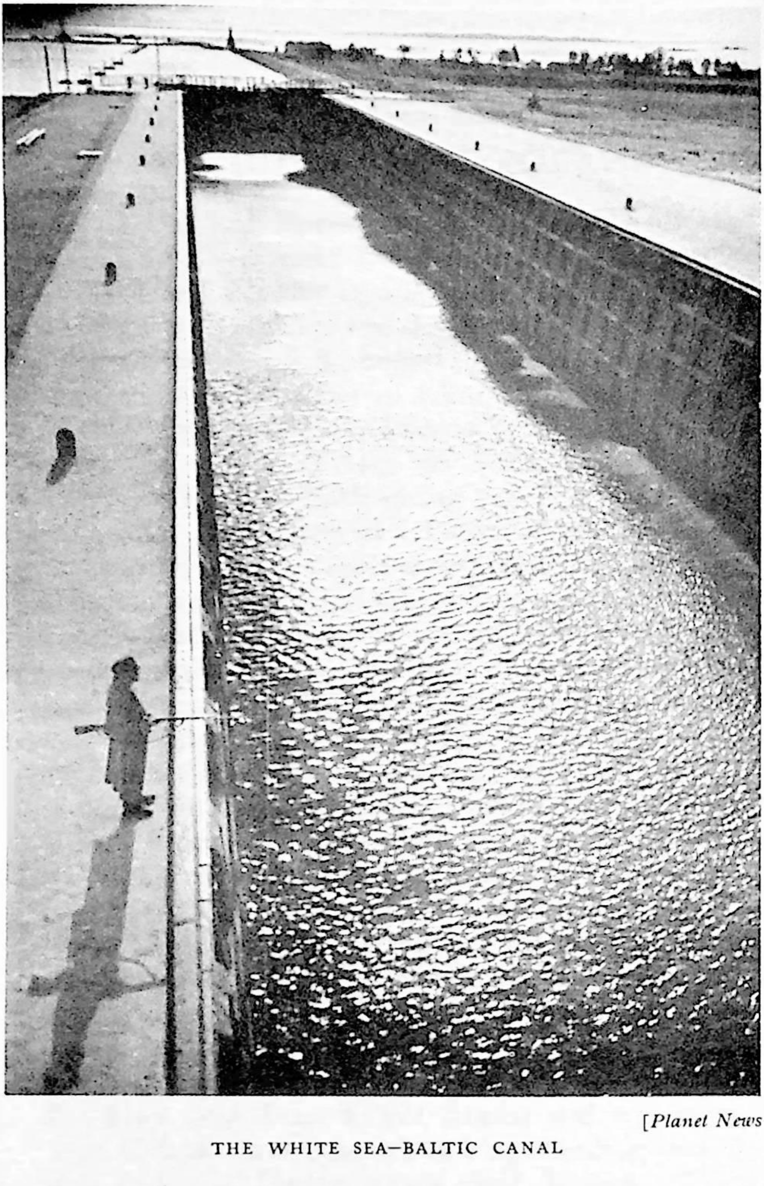
A crowd gathered round me to look at the pieces. Repairs would cost me 1,000 roubles at the very least. And then, as though things weren't bad enough already, a second disaster occurred. A lorry got caught on the slippery slope and very quietly, and quite inexorably, came slithering towards us. If it didn't finish off the car, that was because an odd old nondescript fellow who was leaning over my engine, acted as a buffer between the monster and my Buick. He was crushed by the impact and fell into the road. I never knew whether he survived, having no time to make inquiries. Crippled with cold, I had to take to my bed while the car was being repaired. I came to the conclusion that I could not possibly keep it. The garage charges alone would have taken a third of my salary. I had had enough of Russian roads. Besides, what was the use of having a car if one couldn't afford to buy food?

CHAPTER XXIII

A JOURNEY IN POLAND

THE Political Bureau had just decided to send to Poland a Government Delegation under the presidency of Boév, and I found myself attched to it. The Russian flirtation with Poland was developing favourably. For a long time the U.S.S.R., bound to Germany by the Treaty of Rapallo and a series of commercial agreements, had regarded Poland—"the soldier of French Imperialism and champion of the Treaty of Versailles"—as its most dangerous enemy. Each spring the Political Bureau discussed the possibilities of a Polish offensive, and worked the country up into a state of war fever. Then, somebody had the idea of trying to bring about a reconciliation with Poland, since Germany, in the throes of a crisis of which no one could tell the outcome, had abandoned itself to Nazism. Stalin, though still clinging to the hope of an eventual understanding with Hitler, initiated diplomatic approaches in Warsaw which were well received.

When we arrived in Poland, where we were welcomed with a politeness which was not far removed from open sympathy, public opinion there was still rejoicing at the easing of tension between the two governments, and business circles were hoping to find in Russia a market which would help to give new life to the economic affairs of Poland. Official circles, on the other hand, showed considerable reserve. Colonel Beck had already begun his overtures to Germany. Poland had more to fear from Germany than from Soviet Russia, and was confronted with at least three quarrels of long standing with Berlin: the Corridor, Upper Silesia, and Poznan. There was nothing to estrange her from the U.S.S.R. which, in



[*Planet News*

THE WHITE SEA–BALTIC CANAL

addition, could provide an outlet for her industries which Germany never could. But Colonel Beck, for reasons of internal politics, was a great deal more frightened of Bolshevism than he was of Nazism. Nevertheless we were welcomed in the most friendly manner, and given banquet after banquet. If I had not learned from experience how empty and meaningless official discussions were, my education on this point would have been completed in the following weeks, which left me with a hatred of "toasts". The ambassador at Moscow, M. Lukasiewicz, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs at Warsaw, overwhelmed us with compliments. We were shown over a number of model factories, most of them idle owing to the crisis.

The port of Gdynia gave me an idea of the power of modern industry. In the course of a few years, an entirely new city, equipped to receive ocean liners and to serve as a base for a squadron of warships, had sprung fully armed from a stretch of uninhabited sand-dunes; a spacious, well laid-out city, logically organised to the last detail—not, like our own towns, surrounded by slums and not built by forced labour. . . . There were a lot of things about which I had not yet made up my mind, but I couldn't be ignorant of the fact that the work supplied by our concentration camps had played a sometimes essential part in our exploitation of the northern forests, in the building of our great works at Khibinogorsk and even at Magnitogorsk, and in the construction of the White Sea–Baltic canal. . . .

Our mission to Poland, however, produced no results, or scarcely any, unless one takes account of a few minor orders—a small amount of ore purchased in Upper Silesia by my colleague the president of the "Metaloimport", and a dozen or so machine-tools ordered by me. The final ceremony connected with our journey was staged at Moscow. On our return, M. Lukasiewicz organised a great reception followed by a banquet in honour of the delegation. The reception was attended by the Diplomatic Corps, officials of the Departments of Foreign Affairs and External Commerce, and the High Command of the Red Army. The future Marshals Toukhatchevsky, Boudienny, and Egorov were present and took an active part in the amusements and the dancing as well as in the "serious" discussions which developed in the course of the evening.

The banquet was a more intimate affair. The heads of the two departments with their more important subordinates were the only guests. On either side of M. Lukasiewicz sat Rosengoltz and Krestinsky (Litvinov was abroad), supported by the Vice-Commissars Sokolnikov, Eliava, Loganovsky, and (if my memory is not at fault) Radek and Stern. Since then all these men have been either shot or condemned as "Fascist spies". Lukasiewicz and Boév drank to the "important" results of our trip and to the happy future of Soviet–Polish relations. . . .

A prey to influenza and rheumatism ever since my stay in Warsaw, I went off, a few days later, to the Kremlin hospital, where I was attended by Dr. Levin, who enjoyed the confidence of all members of the Government, and reassured his patients by the attention he paid to them. He was shot recently for having, on his own confession, shortened the last hours of Maxim Gorky, as a result of instructions received from Yagoda, the chief of police. Yagoda, I know, wielded unlimited power, but he was only Stalin's instrument, and old Dr. Levin, whom I knew personally, who had spent his life in untiring efforts to save life and mitigate suffering, was the last man in the world capable of such a murder. . . . I was his client at the same time as two famous men, both of whom have since disappeared, the Georgian Communist Mguéladzé, better known by his pen name Ilya Vardine (he was sent to a concentration camp in 1935 for having had relations with Zinoviev), and Asmus, future minister at Helsinki.

I was going through a sort of crisis. Up till then I had been one of those Communists who, relying on the wisdom of the Party, had seen in the success of the Five Years' Plan the solution of all our problems and the cure for all our ills. Besides, living abroad and entirely absorbed by my work, I had relied on the opinions expressed by the officials of the Party and had been led by the nose by Government lies. I knew that the country was being asked to make enormous efforts and face enormous sacrifices, but I knew it only in an abstract sort of way, and felt quite certain that the fruits of the Plan would soon be visible. Moscow was a terrible eye-opener. Life was better only for a very few: the rest, the man in the street, the masses of the poorer class, seemed to have abandoned themselves to despair. They never dreamed of complaining. The porter of the building in which I lived did a little boot-repairing of an evening in his tiny lodge swarming with children.

"Why do you work so hard?" I asked him, knowing that his official job was not of eight or ten hours, but never stopped.

"Why?" he answered. "Because I am starving. I've got five mouths to fill, and I'm paid 120 roubles."

"But now that bread-cards have been done away with, there's an increase of 10 per cent to cover the difference in the price of bread yesterday and to-day. That ought to help you out. . . ."

"D'you really think so? There are seven of us, counting my wife and the five children. We need seven kilos of bread a day since nothing else can be bought for the same money. The price of bread has been doubled, and all I get more is eight roubles a month, for the 10 per cent is reckoned on the bread-card figures and not on my wages.

So you see, comrade, I must either work at night, steal, or see my whole family starve."

I felt bitter to think that the workers should be in that state at the end of the first Five Years. I couldn't help reflecting that we were past the worst, and yet, under the new "normal" conditions, the comfort of a few was only possible because the majority had been condemned to poverty and misery. The "special" shops were closing down, and new, well-frequented, ones were beginning to open everywhere. But they sold at the prices obtaining on the "free" market which, up to now, we had always regarded as "speculators'" prices. The rouble, little by little, had fallen until its purchasing power was ten, twenty, thirty and forty times below that of 1926, according to the different articles required. Wages had not been doubled in the same period. In a statmeent made to the influential Communists of Moscow, Khroustchev, speaking of wages — a subject which most people in authority preferred to avoid—said that they had risen by 200 roubles a month for skilled, and by 100 for unskilled workers. The ordinary working-class family had to spend on its food (and what food it was, compared with that available in the western countries where I had lived!) 90 per cent of their wretched pay. The standard of living of the Russian workman can only be realised by comparing his wages with the prices of foodstuffs obtaining on the free market, or in the "free" State shops, the only shops of the kind that remained.

Meat cost 9 to 10 roubles a kilo, white bread more than 2, black bread 1 rouble, sugar 10 roubles, rice 9, butter 22 to 26 roubles a kilo, eggs 10 to 12 roubles for ten, a pair of shoes 100 to 150 roubles. It follows therefore that the workman had to go almost entirely without butter and eggs (to say nothing of fruit), and could only very rarely indulge in meat. Black bread, potatoes, cabbage and buckwheat were the main components of his diet.

This state of affairs was carefully concealed by the Soviet Press, and no one living abroad could possibly know of it. There was a renewal of hope when, in 1935, Molotov in the course of an interview which he gave to the editor of the *Temps*, solemnly declared that after two more years all prices would be reduced by 50 per cent. He may have been sincere when he spoke, but, in fact, his words were nothing but a lie. No part of his promise has been realised. The misery of the proletariat—officially the "ruler" of the country—continues. Stalin's only concern to-day is to stay where he is at all costs. Any care for the conditions of the proletariat has now to take second place.

Gradually I began to realise what had caused this intolerable state of affairs, but only at the cost of an endless internal conflict. At each step I took I had, in order to see clearly, to overcome the former sentiments which had bound me to the Party, its authority, and its leaders. I had been brought up in the bosom of the Party; not one single hour of my life had been lived outside the Party; my every idea, judgment and wish had reflected the Party which, in my eyes, represented a collective thought, knowledge and will infinitely superior to anything I could compass by my unaided efforts. I felt now that I should be for ever lost if I did not think my own thoughts and draw my own conclusions. Must I then judge the Party—condemn, perhaps, the Party's policy? I dared not put the question squarely to myself. From that moment my private judgment was formed, but many years were yet to be necessary, years of experience and observation, before it was to bear fruit. My case is not unique. For thousands and thousands of Communists the bloody years 1936–1938 were crucial.

The most trivial details showed me how badly things were tending. I remember passing an evening with several well-known Soviet intellectuals, who shall remain nameless, since I have no wish to be the cause of their undoing. One of them, a famous architect, began suddenly to talk of the project on foot to build a vast Palace of the Soviets to stand just below the Kremlin, facing the Moskova river. Already blasters were at work demolishing the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour with dynamite in order to clear the chosen site. The competition for the winning design had ended with Stalin's choice of an immense, heavy circular building surrounded by a colonnade, to which the architectural genius of our chief had added, as a crowning achievement, a colossal statue of Lenin in stainless steel. . . . "The whole thing," said N——, my architect friend, "will look exactly like one of those rich chocolate cakes so dear to the heart of the Berlin confectioner, into which they sometimes stick a candle, a doll, or a little tuft of flowers. From the technical point of view, it is a step backwards to the worst kind of decorative building popular at the end of last century. Most of the rooms will have to depend on artificial lighting; there will be insufficient exits; the size of the rooms is enormous and will present difficult structural problems. But that's not the worst: the site chosen could just carry the cathedral; the ground is soggy and subsidence frequently occurs; part of the foundations will be in a marsh; the whole place ought to be made good before building starts. . . . But why put up a thing like that at all just below the Kremlin? No one with any knowledge of town planning would have dreamed of doing so. . . ." A few days later I was amazed to see in the papers that the architect N—— had expressed himself most enthusiastically about the scheme! He had been asked to make a statement and dared not openly condemn

Stalin's views. If he had acted differently, not only would his criticisms not have been published, but his own position would have been seriously jeopardised.

"That's how things are, then," thought I, and proceeded to discover a few more objections for myself. Why, for instance, spend millions on building a palace while the entire population of Moscow were suffocating from overcrowding? How explain the fact that not a single working-class member of the Moscow Soviet had got to his feet and said: "Wouldn't it be better, comrades, to use these millions to get rid of the housing problem?" The Soviet had ceased to exist except in name, and any deputy taking himself and his duties thus seriously would have been regarded as a fool, or, worse still, as a counter-revolutionary. Didn't Stalin know better than anyone else what ought to be done?

In my dealings with my staff I noticed similar changes. Trade Unionism had almost ceased to exist. Formerly, the local "chapel" had been a power to be reckoned with whenever it came to inflicting punishment, dismissing employees, or in anyway altering the conditions of labour. Now, like the factory managers, I need bother my head about no one. The "chapel" existed, but its activities were confined to carrying on the small amount of agitation demanded of it by the Party cell. Apart from this, all it did was to see that the so-called "voluntary" loans (they were, in fact, forced) were duly paid. There had ceased to be any protection whatever for the clerk in the office or the worker in the factory.

Men for whom I had had an unstinted admiration were changed beyond recognition. Take Choumiatsky, for example, with whom I had worked in Persia. On his return from Teheran he had been put in charge of the school for Chinese officers, where cadets were trained for the Red Armies of China. After a short time there he was transferred to the Institute of Eastern Workers, and finally ended up as Director of Cinematographic Production. This, surely, would be a fine field for his bubbling energy, his personal tastes, his Marxist sympathies, with their background of wide culture! But no; for ever since the first great films of Eisenstein, Poudovkin and Dovjenko, the Soviet cinema, though it had at its doors a series of magnificent sites and a whole continent to play with, though it could draw on the folk-lore of forty peoples and a recent historic past crammed full of incident, had been obviously going backward. We were producing nothing of importance. I often wondered why. Mutual friends gave me some details of Choumiatsky's work, and I wondered no longer. Any little sign of inventiveness was nipped in the bud by a pedantic censorship, and the categorical instructions of the central authority invaded even the fields of thought and imagination. The man in charge of our film industry had no time to see the producers—no matter how famous—who knocked at his door. He could spare his departmental managers but a few hurried minutes once a week. And yet no one dared do anything without his definite permission and approval, because it was known that he was in Stalin's confidence and that Stalin took an interest in the cinema.

How then did Choumiatsky the organiser, the cutter of knots, the revolutionary, spend his precious hours—in trying to enlist the favours of the great for his productions? Not a bit of it! Most of his time was taken up in running round to various villas inhabited by the powerful men of Russian politics, Stalin, Kaganovitch, Voroshilov, Mikoyan, who was Stalin's friend, X or Y recommended by Kaganovitch, giving exhibitions in private theatres of foreign films which the public would never see, which even the "specialists" would never see, imported for gold in order to amuse the high aristocracy of the Soviets. Before any Russian film could be shown generally, it had first to be projected privately for Stalin and then for various other people. Choumiatsky had to listen to advice which was often a thinly disguised command, make unexpected alterations, suppress whole films without a word of explanation, and sack artistes or managers just because the master had frowned. Awards, in his world, were distributed as arbitrarily as condemnation and penalties. Orlova, a young actress of no particular merit, for no other reason than that she had appealed to the master in *The Circus* and *Les Joyeux Garçons*, was created "Artiste Emeritus" of the Republic, an honour which had been instituted for outstanding performers of twenty and thirty years' service. Choumiatsky, the director of a great industry, unable to cope with the work put upon him, and doing no more than paralyse the best efforts of his subordinates, had become a mere servile factotum of the ruling bureaucracy. He built himself a princely palace just outside Moscow . . . but he did not enjoy it for long. Except that he was an "old Bolshevik" I do not know what the authorities had against him, for he had never shown the slightest sympathy for the Opposition. But however that may be, he disappeared in 1937, and, since nobody who had occupied an official position was ever allowed to retire into private life, he must now be in some prison or other, unless the master has seen fit to take his life.

Rosengoltz, the People's Commissar for External Commerce, had also changed greatly since the days of "the battle for gold". He had always shown a liking for authority and iron administration. To me he had always seemed the perfect bureaucrat, full of energy in his allotted field, but fearful of responsibility and criticism—the two tendencies usually going hand in hand. I will go in some detail into a few of the jobs which I carried out under his directions, since they serve to illuminate the general system.

On my return from Poland, we were instructed by the Political Bureau to countermand our German orders and to revise our budget so that preference should be given to Great Britain and the United States. So much had to be done in so short a time that we found it impossible to send our specialists to the great Empire Exhibition of Machinery organised by Great Britain, to which I had been officially invited by the Government of that country. We had to place our orders on information derived from catalogues only. Besides, the authorities were becoming chary of letting specialists out of Russia because, ever since the Engineers' Trial—and several other executions and acts of repression—they had shown a tendency to remain abroad. A new mentality was becoming apparent among our rulers, now that the chief financial difficulties had been surmounted. "Let the directors of foreign firms come to Moscow if they want our orders!" In this way I made the acquaintance of a Mr. Brown, manager of a large English machinery concern, who came to discuss business with me. I showed him over our new ball-bearing factory, Charikopodchipnik, which had been built under the supervision of my friend Bodrov, whom I had known in Bokhara and in France. He had been formerly a Commissar with Boudienny's cavalry, and had become an admirable Director of Industry. It was he who organised the first Soviet watch factory with machinery bought during his trip to America, Switzerland having refused to sell to us.

The manufacture of ball-bearings, involves much detailed calculation and extreme precision of workmanship. The machinery used for the purpose is very costly, must be the very best possible, and has to be maintained with scrupulous care. When I went through the shops with Mr. Brown, a number of the machines were standing idle since no one had yet learned how to use them. But there was worse to come. My guest noticed that the floors of the rooms in which the work of highest precision was carried out were made of cement. "Cement dust," he said, "will soon deteriorate delicate machinery." Nobody had ever thought of that! Two years later I went over the factory again where an epic struggle was being carried on against bad work. Alleged sabotage was being hunted down, there was a never-ending series of inquiries, and "shock tactics" had been introduced with all the usual slogans of "Enthusiasm" and "Get on with the Plan". But I noticed that the floors were still made of cement! There had been no time to stop the machines and make the necessary alterations. The Party chiefs insisted that the Plan should be "exceeded".

Bodrov, goaded on by the Political Bureau, had brought his monthly production of ball-bearings up to two million, but only at the cost of keeping his machines running without the necessary stoppages for overhauling. The result was that his equipment was subjected to excessive strain and the nerves of his men worn to a shred. Ordjonikidzé, the People's Commissar for Heavy Industry, was demanding an output of three million. Bodrov insisted that his machines should be overhauled, and was dismissed. He, like others, disappeared. A man named Mélamed was taken on in his stead to carry out the Bureau's maximum programme. For three months he succeeded in doing so. But though at the time he was lavishly rewarded, that did not prevent him from being denounced later as an "enemy of the people" because he had allowed his plant to deteriorate. A certain Ioussim, a young engineer known for his Stakhanovist enthusiasm, replaced Mélamed in charge of the factory. I pity him! It is the common thing for the papers to publish "records" in industrial production while keeping a discreet silence about the cost involved. The usual method consists in replacing all machinery ruined by rough and excessive use, in other words, by sending good money after bad. The real cost price of our goods is probably higher than in any country in the world, though it is true that the extremely low scale of wages makes it possible for us to cover some of our losses.

I noticed the same sort of thing in the automobile industry. The atmosphere was so depressing that I began to dream of finding a funk-hole in some job where I should not have to shoulder any responsibility, a librarianship perhaps, or box-office clerk in a theatre! I longed, at times, for more time for thought, for some occupation which, by establishing me on some different rung of the social ladder, would enable me to look at things and verify my doubts. I resigned from the Stankoimport, and asked the Central Committee to send me on a course to the Military Aviation School. But Party discipline was strict. The Central Committee put me at the disposal of Rosengoltz. He appointed me president of the Motor-Aero-Exportation Trust, the Auto-Moto-Export. "You are an Orientalist, and you are very much interested in cars," he said. "You will have a wide field of operations —the conquest of the whole Eastern market!"

Up till then the U.S.S.R. had been only importing machinery. We had no idea of competing with Western producers, but Sinkiang, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Turkey and Persia offered us very profitable markets, to which our system of communications would give us easy access. In Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan, we should find ourselves up against British and American competition. I won't go into the question of what steps were taken in

Moscow to establish the machinery of so important a Trust, nor of the fight I had to get suitable premises and an adequate staff. Our chief export article was to be a three-ton lorry, built in the Stalin works to American specifications. There was also a rather smaller lorry and a touring car. The far-sighted Henry Ford had concluded a contract with us by the terms of which we were forbidden to export, until 1938, the cars coming from our Gorky factory, though in 1934 we had still failed to produce anything later than his 1930 model. To produce for export, therefore, we signed a series of agreements with the English Vauxhall Company and the Egyptian Ford Company for which my Trust obtained the sole representation in Mongolia, Sinkiang, and Northern Afghanistan.

I had the greatest difficulty in getting hold of any Soviet cars for export purposes. The drawing-up and execution of export schemes was a matter for the Political Bureau. That meant that not a single kilo of wheat or butter, not a single ton of cotton, of ore, of castings, not one metre of textiles, not a car, not a machine, could be exported (or imported) beyond the schedule laid down by the Plan, without a special ruling of the Politbureau and an order signed by Stalin himself in virtue of his position as Secretary-General of the Party and countersigned by Molotov in the name of the Government. All schemes were discussed in detail by the Political Bureau. Stalin examined personally and passed every piece of production earmarked for export, decided the sale price and the conditions of payment, as well as the sums to be accepted in terms of foreign currency. His word was final no matter what decision had been reached by the four other controlling bodies—the Department of External Commerce, the Central Committee of Planning which drew up the schedules, the Political Bureau of the Party which deliberated on the figures laid before it and settled the action to be taken, and the Government which countersigned the Politbureau's findings. Each single scheme was reviewed by these four bodies under three headings: (1) Annual plan dealing with the quantity of industrial goods intended for export; (2) Annual plan of distribution of exports arranged in order of countries to be supplied; (3) Quarterly plan.

All exports and imports had to go through this process. The allotment of cars, as of every other article, for internal use was conducted in a similar fashion. Trusts and administrative bodies indented for what they required, after which the central office of the automobile industry drew up a rationing order which was submitted to the Political Bureau. After being passed by Stalin this order was sent on to the Government to receive the sanction of the Council of People's Commissars. The Government never assumed the responsibility of altering by a jot the decisions of the Political Bureau. It acted merely as a recording and forwarding office. In order to save time Rosengoltz often communicated to me and to the other presidents of Trusts connected with the Department of External Commerce, the texts of urgent decisions taken by the Political Bureau, including certain definite instructions and export schedules, before they came back from the President of the Government copied on to headed paper and so endowed with the authority of official instructions. Whenever we had a more or less important decision to take, he said to me: "Draw up a Political Bureau scheme, Barmine." This he would correct and take to "the Boss" on one of the days when he was giving audience. Stalin's magic signature was necessary for everything. It appeared three separate times on all decisions affecting my sales operations, and on all movement orders without which nothing could be sent out of the country. It appeared finally on all decisions having to do with finance and prices, on all transport charters, on all balance sheets, on all statements of administrative charges and additional costs, etc.

If I stress this point and go into all these details, it is because, during the latest of the Moscow trials, the wretched Rosengoltz was forced to confess himself a Trotskyist, a saboteur, and a Fascist agent, was made to admit that he had embezzled considerable sums of money appearing on his departmental budget for the purpose of financing Trotsky plots abroad, and had deliberately exported to Japan huge quantities of castings knowing that the machine factories of the U.S.S.R. were standing idle because (or so it was said) they couldn't get deliveries of metal. The operations to which he alluded in his speech, and about which the court was careful not to demand details, were, in fact, quite impossible. I leave my readers to guess what must have been the state of mind of his colleagues, and, generally speaking of all officials of Industry, Commerce, Finance and of the Party, who, reading the account of the trial, must have known at once that the confessions couldn't be other than untrue! What follows will make what I have written even clearer.

My Trust accounted for more than half the credit of eight million gold dollars put at the disposition of Turkey by the U.S.S.R. One of my first transactions was the sale of several hundred lorries to the Turkish Government, for which I signed a contract with the ambassador, Vassyf-Bey. A little later the municipality of Ankara, through the offices of M. Nourolla Soumer de Soumerbank, who came to Moscow for the purpose, bought 100 motor-buses. This figure made me wonder. The capital of Turkey was providing 100 motor-buses for its 150,000 inhabitants, while Moscow, with its 3,500,000, had fewer than 400, a third or a quarter of which were always under repair. At the very moment when the Turkish ship which had arrived at Odessa was preparing to take on board my lorries and buses, Rosengoltz telephoned me to stop loading.

"But why, Arkadi Pavlovitch?"

"The License Control Board has just informed me that this dispatch does not appear on the quarterly schedule approved by the Politbureau."

"But it was approved in the annual schedule, and there has been a special decision of the Political Bureau and of the Government concerning all deliveries to Turkey! We shall be penalised, and the Turkish ambassador has urged me to speed up deliveries."

"Impossible! You know as well as I do what strict instructions there are on this point. Draw up a Political Bureau scheme as soon as you can, showing an increase to the quarterly schedule. I will take it to 'the Boss' at the very first opportunity."

But "the Boss" was busy with other things. The heavy bureaucratic machine worked slowly. The Turkish ship returned empty. We lost almost two months, which cost us dear, but the quarterly schedule was more important than any consideration of trade, good sense, or commercial undertaking. Without the necessary signature Rosengoltz could not execute the contract. In fact there was nothing he could do, since his own Customs Board would have forbidden the cars to leave the country.

I suggested sending two cars to the Paris Motor Show. Rosengoltz, whom I managed to interest in the suggested publicity, took my scheme to the Kremlin. Stalin decided that it was not worth while.

There was a balance of about £4,000 to £5,000 standing to our credit in a London bank. This had nothing to do with the Plan, but represented commission paid to us by

[*Planet News*

VOROSHILOV

English and American firms according to contract for their cars re-exported by us and sold by Auto-Moto-Export in Eastern markets. In view of the impending arrival in Moscow of foreign importers, I asked leave to spend a small portion of this sum, which did not appear on the balance-sheet of the Plan, for the purpose of buying a really good car to be used during their visit and afterwards to remain the property of the Trust. Rosengoltz could not give me the necessary permission, which needed the authorisation of the master. Consequently, in order to get my guests about—guests of an automobile trust at that!—I had to hire cars from Intourist!

I was filled with a sense of revolt and disgust when I read Rosengoltz's confession, according to which he said that he had knowingly increased the export of castings to Japan in order to produce a state of sabotage, and to help the cause of Fascism. I remembered the number of times I had been summoned to Rosengoltz's office in order to be told of the latest Political Bureau's decisions about the exportations to be made by my Trust, and to append my signature to the papers, thus making myself, as was usual, personally responsible for the execution of the projects. I often used to meet there my colleague Polichtchouk, the young president of Technoexport. This new-born Trust, the outcome, like my own, of successes in the industrial field, exported rails, agricultural machinery, castings, etc. I remember that on the document bearing Stalin's signature at the bottom of the paragraph instructing Auto-Moto-Export to send a number of lorries to Sinkiang considerably beyond the total envisaged by the Plan, opposite which I myself signed, was a sentence relating to Technoexport, and containing, almost word for word, the following decision:

"The Quarterly Plan for the export of castings presented by Technoexport has been found insufficient. It has been decided to increase the amounts shown by *x* thousands of tons, and to instruct the Department of External Commerce, on the personal responsibility of Comrade Rosengoltz and the president of Technoexport, Comrade Polichtchouk, to place the supplementary quantities herein mentioned on the foreign market within thirty days. In arranging for this, note should be taken especially of the particularly favourable prices now obtaining in Japan, Turkey and Persia. Comrades Ordjonikidzé and Piatakov are hereby instructed to see that the necessary deliveries are made by the factories concerned, after consultation with Comrade Rosengoltz, within the period named. The president of the Party Committee of Control, Comrade Ejov, shall superintend the execution of this decision, and shall report results to the Political Bureau. . . ."

Poor Polichtchouk, who appended his signature to this paragraph, can hardly have imagined that his chief Rosengoltz, and probably he himself, would pay with their heads for this "categorical instruction" issued by the "wonderful" man who was at the head of the State. The name of Polichtchouk, actually responsible for executing these "counter-revolutionary and pro-Fascist" decisions, did not appear among the list of prisoners at the last trial. We can but guess his fate.

My readers can find in the issues of *Pravda* at this time certain triumphant declarations of the editor, Mechlis, the gist of which was that the success of Russian industrialisation might be seen by the increased exports of castings to every country in the world, and, in particular, to Japan.

Business took me frequently to the Stalin motor works in Moscow, and sometimes to the Gorky works at Nijni-Novgorod. Both places were in a constant state of siege. The atmosphere was one of feverish excitement: work never stopped night and day; committees of control were everywhere; the technical directors seemed completely exhausted, no longer able to think straight about anything, with no time to shave, sleep or eat. At any moment some new danger might crop up and have to be dealt with. Sometimes it was the men, sometimes the raw material, sometimes the administrative staff, sometimes something else, but at every hour of the day or night something was always going wrong at the critical moment. Whatever happened the Plan had got to be carried out. Every individual felt personally responsible, and knew that he might pay with his life for any failure.

I can still see Likhachev, the director of the Stalin works, rushing about, white as a sheet, in a little group of engineers and foremen, shouting, threatening, swearing. He got as good as he gave; the place was like Hell. Suddenly an office boy ran up. "Central Committee on the telephone." In such appalling conditions he had to control the movements of more than 25,000 men, of whom over 10,000 were occupied in constructing additional shops. His task was complicated by the fact that the industries which ought to have fed him did not exist. He had to create them, get them into running order, and manage, somehow or other, to produce himself everything that he needed.

At Gorky, in similar unbelievable conditions, Diakonov was in control of 25,000 to 27,000 workers, as well as an additional 15,000 occupied in building operations. He was in his office night and day, and it was with the greatest difficulty that his departmental heads managed to see him once a week. He was up to his eyes in papers, instructions, interminable conferences and discussions, and frittered away his energies in dealing with innumerable details of his organisations and trivial breakdowns of routine. He was heart and soul in his work and completely wore himself out, at the end to find himself sacrificed. A new director took his place. His fate was shared by thousands of directors of trusts, factories, *sovkhoses*, machine depots and the like. They have just vanished into the void. New men have come forward. But the system remains the same, and, inevitably, they will meet the same treatment.

In the general running of the automobile industry, Likhachev and Diakonov were under the orders of Dybetz, a former workman who, as an anarchist, had emigrated to America whence he had returned in 1920 and joined the Party under the ægis of Bukharin whom he had known in New York. He was energetic and capable and played a great part in the creation of our automobile industry, before ending his career in prison, to which he was condemned in 1937 with his assistant Meyer, Bukharin's testimonial to his character having been found among the Central Committee's records. So far as I know, all the men who were sponsored over a period of twenty years by Bukharin and the others who were shot with him, have suffered similar fates.

I should like to put on record here two memories: one, from the point of view of contrast, the other because it is instructive. In 1932, when I was in Antwerp, I made the acquaintance of the director of the Ford works. He received me in a comfortable glass-partitioned office, situated in the very middle of the factory. The appearance of his office was sufficiently striking. Instead of the mass of papers, files, drawings, plans, and sealed envelopes which would have littered the deck of any director of a Soviet industry, I saw before me a perfectly smooth surface broken only by a single white scribbling block. The man himself was calm and cheerful. During our interview he sat quietly at his table within reach of his telephone. . . .

It happened, on another occasion, that I was detailed to show the Citröen works in Paris to the real pioneer of our motor industry, Obolensky-Ossinsky, an old Socialist of wide erudition who had been the first man to persuade the chiefs of the U.S.S.R. to try and create a powerful automobile industry of their own. M. Citröen was interested in our schemes and in the results we were achieving. Ossinsky spoke of both with some legitimate pride. "Our works at Gorky," said he with a smile, "will have an output greater than all yours put together."

The substance of M. Citröen's reply was as follows: "I admire the efforts you are making, but it seems to me that an industry as concentrated as yours needs superb technical efficiency, a tradition of running, and an uninterrupted flow of material. So long as such conditions are not realised, I should say it would have been better policy to have built several factories on a rather smaller scale. The administration of such gigantic industries is a very difficult problem. . . ."

I was never to see Ossinsky again. He was later in charge of the Central Statistical Office, and was ultimately imprisoned—treated, like so many other men who had come to the aid of the Republic in its earliest days, as an enemy of the people.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DIFFICULTY OF EXPORTING LORRIES TO PERSIA

TRADE was made no easier for us than manufacture, and for the same reasons. My colleague, N——, was sent to Persia where he signed a contract for the delivery of 250 lorries. The People's Under-Commissar for External Commerce, Eliava, an old Bolshevik of Georgian origin, and one of the founders of the first Socialist organisations of the Caucasus, made a journey of inspection to Teheran and returned so satisfied with what he had seen that, on the strength of his report, the Central Committee decided "to issue imperative instructions to the Automobile Exportation Trust, to raise the total of cars intended for Persia to 400." Negligence on the part of somebody in the office left me in ignorance of this order. I never knew of it until I was summoned before the Party Commission of Control, a formidable institution, presided over by Ejov (he was always turning up!), which was for ever keeping an eye on the Communist administrators.

Joukovsky, one of Ejov's assistants, received me with a severe expression.

"The instructions," I said, "were never handed on to me. The fault was not mine. Blame the man who kept a paper of such importance locked away in his drawer."

"Ignorance of the law is no excuse. Instructions issued by the Central Committee have for us the force of law."

"In any case the instructions couldn't have been carried out because the Soviet–Persian Bank has refused us any further credits."

Joukovsky immediately flew into a passion. He was not used to being argued with. As I was to learn later, officials called before him for disciplinary offences were expected to plead guilty. "Can't be carried out" is a phrase that must never be used in connexion with Central Committee instructions.

He chose to give his ill-humour the appearance of surprise.

"What's that? Are you telling me that our own exports are financed by our own bank? Who gets the profit then? —some private firm, obviously. I suppose you realise that you are committing a crime!"

Clearly he was quite ignorant of the workings of Eastern trade. Exporting countries set up banks with the prime object of assisting their commercial transactions. Our contract in Persia was with the Ramazavov firm, which, in order to pay us, borrowed the necessary funds from the Soviet–Persian Bank. The bank, in its turn, took a mortgage on the lorries. In this way risks were cut to a minimum, and the firm was assured of solvency. A further detail increased Joukovsky's fury. The man I had sent to Teheran was not a member of the Party.

"Barmine, you have been guilty of gross irregularity. The whole thing smacks of criminal action. I shall take steps against you."

I knew well enough that I stood very little chance of being acquitted. The only thing I could do was to try and carry out the Central Committee's instructions at short notice, and for that I should have to get a supplementary credit from the External Commerce Bank. The director, a man named Svanidze, seemed agreeable to doing what I asked, but somehow everything went wrong from the very beginning. A telephone call from the Central Committee had the effect of putting a stop to all question of credits. The bank officials looked extremely apologetic. I could see that the idea of imminent legal proceedings was frightening them. Under these conditions it would be impossible for me to execute even the original scheme, which was for the export of 250 cars. When I reached home I found an order to report to the Economic Board of the O.G.P.U. There were thus two summonses against me, running parallel, and conducted in precisely the same spirit. The Commission of Control met to announce its decision.

In the corridor I ran into my old friend Loganovsky, who was acting, at that time, as assistant to Rosengoltz. He said: "You're going to be reprimanded." A reprimand is one of the secondary acts of discipline inflicted by the Party, but it does not mean that a criminal summons may not be issued later. The order of punishments is as follows: warning; reprimand; severe reprimand; exclusion. . . .

The president was Chkiriatov, who was acting for Ejov. One circumstance seemed to bother the Commission and was counted in my favour. The firm of Ramazovov, finding its credits with the Soviet Bank cut, had gone to the Bank of Iran, from which it had got a sufficient advance to make it possible to pay me cash. Unfortunately, however, the stipulated date of delivery was now past, the negotiations had been interrupted, and there could now be no question of increasing the total of our exports to Persia. Joukovsky had worded the reprimand so as to accuse me of negligence in having entered into contract with a firm offering insufficient guarantees, and of having inflicted material damage on the State by causing a breakdown of negotiations. I pleaded Eliava's favourable report, and argued that the payments actually made sufficiently demonstrated the solid financial position of the firm in question. Negotiations had not, I pointed out, been interrupted; consequently, no material damage had been done. I could feel that my defence had the effect of irritating the Commission, since it put them in a false position. Chkiriatov changed his line of attack.

"But the Central Committee's plan has not been executed."

"I was not informed of that plan."

"No one has any right to be ignorant of the decisions of the Party."

Shortly afterwards, Levsky, one of the directors of the Petrol Syndicate, was brought up on a similar charge. But he made no attempt to defend himself. Instead, he pleaded guilty and begged the indulgence of the court. During the adjournment Loganovsky, who had not dared to speak in my favour, said:

"You're behaving like a child. Why not admit it when you're wrong, like everybody else? If you do that you'll get off with a warning."

I was reprimanded. This was the first disciplinary action that had been taken against me in seventeen years spent in the service of the Party, and it hurt me the more for being utterly unjust. Rosengoltz refused to interfere, and when I pointed out to him that, in similar circumstances, Ordjonikidzé, the Head of the Heavy Industries, had not hesitated to defend his colleagues against Ejov, told me dryly to take my complaint to Eliava. Our relations had become strained as the result of another incident of which I shall speak later. Eliava agreed to ring up Ejov in my presence and try to get the reprimand rescinded. But he spoke in such deferential terms, and in a tone of humility so unworthy of a former member of the Revolutionary War Council, that I realised at once that he could do nothing. Ejov already wielded great power behind the scenes and was feared by even the oldest members of the Party. (Eliava, a personal friend of Enoukidzé, has since disappeared.)

I was instrumental in exporting cars to Sinkiang, Shanghai, and even to Uruguay. The limousines and graceful torpedo-bodies of the Ford and Vauxhall companies were finding their way into Mongolia and Sinkiang at the same time as our far cruder lorries. The cases loaded by Ford in New York had to cover several thousands of miles by sea, as far as Leningrad and Odessa, and thence had to be carried almost another 10,000 kilometres by rail to Siberia and Kirghiz. In Verkneoudinsk the Fords, shining with blue cellulose and nickel-chromium, were taken out of their cases, and ultimately arrived at Ylan Bator, the capital of Mongolia, by way of impracticable roads deep in mud, and across numerous small rivers and extensive marshlands.

The Mongol Government rationed them to the ministers, the high dignitaries of the Mongolian Republic, and the heads of the People's Party.

These officials, all ardent hunters, have found a new way of using these triumphs of modern engineering technique. Driven at full speed across the flat, hard surface of the immense steppes, standing on the seats, they hunt the wild game and shoot the terrified hares and birds that they put up in their course.

The cars destined for Sinkiang were sometimes towed by camels for hundreds of kilometres to the residence of some semi-feudal Khan of the Altai.

Within a very short space of time, cars so roughly treated became unusable. Enormous quantities of spare parts had to be sent, which took many months to reach their destination.

Persia and Turkey, being more civilised, were very different from these exotic markets. Trade with these two countries necessitated greater elasticity of handling and greater speed. We were able to succeed there only by dint of modifying our methods of production. In Russia, we could, if need be, sell our cars without any spare parts and keep the customer waiting if he wanted anything. In Persia and Turkey we were faced with very different conditions. What we couldn't provide, others could, and that meant that we lost our customers. At a meeting of directors, at which Rosengoltz presided, I proposed to start refitting depots at Askabad, Baku, and Odessa, so as to be able to carry out orders on the spot. The State Departments put up a passive resistance which was insurmountable. I spoke without mincing my words. They were received in icy silence, and the proposal was turned down. Rosengoltz, who, up to that moment, had always shown me signs of affection, was deliberately unfriendly. I had presumed to discuss the bureaucracy! He would stomach no such criticism. His over-sensitive temperament interpreted it as an attack on the spirit of the hierarchy.

About the same period, Ordjonikidzé, paying a visit to the Moscow automobile factory, stopped in front of one of the cars ear-marked for export. The finish was quite different from that employed on the cars meant for the home market. "I want all production to be of this quality!" he said to Likhachev, the director, as though merely to express a wish in such matters was tantamount to getting it carried out. The imperturbable Likhachev replied: "Right, it shall be done." Nothing in fact was done, because the technical equipment of the shops and the constant race after quantity ("always go one better than the Plan", was another of Ordjonikidzé's slogans) made it impossible.

I was told of this magnificent proposal while I was busy working out a not unconnected problem. My three-ton lorries had shown themselves to be so strong that the Persian drivers, who used them for their own private businesses, were in the habit of carrying loads amounting to seven tons. They added a metre to their length by contrivances of their own. Reckoning, as we had to, on the state of the Russian roads, we worked to a 150 per cent margin in questions of load. Our model was primitive and heavy, but it was strong. I suggested a slight modification of construction which would have had the effect of providing a more economical type capable of carrying five to six tons—twice the advertised load. But this would have demanded greater accuracy in the shops, and more attention to certain details. Armed with letters from a number of Persian drivers, I succeeded, without difficulty, in convincing Likhachev and his chief, Michael Kaganovitch, the brother of Lazar. The motor journal, *Za Roulem*, published my article on this subject. But Ordjonikidzé shelved the question with the words: "No, better wait until we can build a new factory. We can always find money and labour." He thought he could increase output merely by giving an order, but at the thought of creating a new and more sensible model, his courage failed him. In a word, he preferred sinking more capital to improving the technical methods of already existing plants.

It was at this time that I met for the last time several of our army chiefs. In connexion with certain exports my Trust had to keep in close touch with the High Command.

I am going to begin this part of my memories with a description of the great review of the Red Army. It was the last of a long series of such majestic and impressive parades which I had attended, first as a participant with the other members of the College, later as a spectator. I had seen Toukhatchevsky take the place of Voroshilov at one review in particular on the Red Square at which I was present with a Turkish delegation. On that occasion an incident occurred which, had my attitude

[*France Presse*

MARSHAL TOUKHATCHEVSKY

of mind not been already fixed, might have made me think. Cards of admission to the stands were extremely difficult to obtain, and I was particularly anxious that my guests should have an opportunity of appreciating the military might of the U.S.S.R. I was advised, as a last resort, to make application to Pauker and Volovitch, two high officials of the O.G.P.U. and colleagues of Yagoda, whose special duty it was to see to the personal safety of Stalin. Since he was to be present, these two men had complete discretion to do what they thought fit. They immediately granted my request. Now, Pauker and Volovitch, who for years may be said to have carried Stalin's life in their hands, who could, in perfect safety, have organised any sort of attempt on it, have recently been denounced as terrorists, as agents of foreign powers, as accomplices of Trotsky and of Satan himself! No doubt they have been shot—but really because they knew too much about the imposture that was being worked upon the Russian people. . . .

On the stroke of ten the sound of a trotting horse struck through the tense silence of the square on which the troops were drawn up. Toukhatchevsky, mounted, came through the Gate of the Saviour and beneath the high Byzantine tower. Kork, his friend and companion in arms, also mounted, rode to meet him, saluted, and in a few words rendered his report on the garrison. The stands were full to overflowing. Stalin was stationed on the one built over Lenin's tomb, standing with his hand upon the granite balustrade. Toukhatchevsky and Kork, surrounded by their staffs, took their places beneath the tomb, and the troops began to move past these two men whose fate it was to be shot soon afterwards; infantry, rifles with fixed bayonets at the slope, cavalry, tanks—small, large and amphibian—lorries mounted with anti-aircraft guns. Planes under the command of Alksnis covered the sky. It was a day of apotheosis. Who could have been fool enough to imagine that the Chief watching it all from just above Lenin's mortal remains, would soon be massacring and branding as traitors the men who had created such strength and now controlled and led it?

I had seen Stalin applaud Toukhatchevsky's speech at the last Congress of the Soviets, held in the great palace of the Kremlin. On that occasion, when Toukhatchevsky appeared on the platform, the whole room rose to its feet and greeted him with a storm of applause. The ovation was marked out from all others of the kind by its force and sincerity. Toukhatchevsky, who was a good orator, made a speech that swept the audience off its feet, never so much as glancing at a note. The figures and percentages of armament and recruiting increases which he quoted showed the enormous might of the Red Army. He was listened to in silence as though his words had woven a spell about his listeners. . . .

I had many times been received by Toukhatchevsky in his office at the Commissariat of Defence. A certain number of my marketing operations had to be approved by the High Defence Council presided over by Voroshilov with Toukhatchevsky and Gamarnik as his vice-presidents. The occasion of my first visit is fast fixed in my memory. The marshal got up and came forward to greet me with that spontaneous courtesy which he always showed to his juniors. He had grown fatter and older-looking; his hair was turning grey at the temples; his face was large and virile. The only things about him that remained unchanged were his air of calm assurance and his attentive manner of speaking. During our interview the telephone rang. The marshal took up the receiver and then, suddenly, jumped to his feet, replying in an entirely different, a definitely respectful, voice: "Good morning Klimentii Efrémovitch . . . exactly as you wish, Klimentii Efrémovitch . . . that shall be done Klimentii Efrémovitch. . . ." That was the way in which he took orders from Voroshilov. The short scene made a curious impression on me. Seeing a great soldier obey in just that fashion helped me later to understand why it was that my questions took two or three days to get an answer. Toukhatchevsky no longer dared to take decisions; he merely carried out orders. He, too, had to ask, and his actions had to conform to the instructions he received from Voroshilov on the one hand and from the Political Bureau on the other. Other signs drove me to the conclusion that his will had had to bend, and that in the vast bureaucratic system, he, like others, had become but one more official.

My Trust had undertaken to deliver to some foreign government several aeroplanes for training purposes. It was my duty to submit the matter to Toukhatchevsky and Gamarnik in the absence of Voroshilov. It was not anything of very great importance, for the Political Bureau had already given a decision about the machines in question. But the question had now arisen of supplying certain accessories, the manufacture of which depended upon the sanction of the Defence Commissariat. My discussions with the two army chiefs lasted for three weeks. Delivery became longer and longer delayed. Voroshilov, without whom no one dared to come to any decision, had not come back from Sotchi where he was having a holiday. On my representations Gamarnik decided to ring him up; a secretary replied: "Wait until the People's Commissar gets back!"

On another occasion, a long memorandum, dealing with purely technical questions, which I had forwarded to the marshal by the hands of the Chief of the General Staff, was returned to me with marginal remarks, comments, corrections and instructions inserted opposite each paragraph and after every proposal, in Voroshilov's own hand! To such an extent had all power become centralised—which means that the initiative of subordinates was crushed at birth. I have an idea, too, that in most cases Voroshilov himself did not dare to take a decision without first consulting Stalin.

In western countries neither public opinion nor serious statesmen have ever really believed the many infamous stories of plots, of secret relations with the Nazis, and of espionage undertaken in the interests of Germany. When these charges, overflowing from the Stalinist Press, appeared in the columns of foreign papers, it was only too clear how the articles had originated. The U.S.S.R. today possesses enormous powers of persuasion, but nobody is deceived. The results of all this propaganda fall far below the intentions of its organisers. Another version of what happened exists, and has found more credit in impartial circles. According to it Toukhatchevsky's group had political sympathies of its own at variance with Stalin's, and of a Germanophil tendency. Not satisfied with the course things were taking, it tried to impose its own views on the Government and had first flown a few kites with the object of ascertaining what the German reaction would be. This version of what happened is no less absurd and untrue than the other. Those only could believe it who knew nothing whatever about the true part played by the Political Bureau, by Stalin, and by Voroshilov, in the control of the army. All questions affecting its political complexion, as well as practical problems of merely minor importance, could be determined by Gamarnik, by Toukhatchevsky or even by Voroshilov *only* after detailed and precise instructions had been received from the Political Bureau—that is to say from Stalin. This general statement applied with still greater force where relations with foreign powers (no

[Planet News

FLIGHT-COMMANDER ALKSNIS
COMMANDER OF RED ARMY AIR FORCES

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ADMIRAL ORLOV
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF SOVIET NAVY

matter if they were confined to the limited field of technology) came to be involved. Any contract necessitating technical assistance from abroad was discussed, more than once and line by line, at the Political Bureau, which controlled all correspondence on such subjects.

How, in these conditions, is it possible to believe that Toukhatchevsky and his friends, who could not take a single step without the concurrence of the People's Commissar, could have carried on conversations and exchanged letters with the representatives of foreign powers, without Voroshilov being privy to every word?

The execution of these generals who represented the fine flower of our leadership and would have controlled the High Command and the General Staff in the next war, has struck an irreparable blow at the strength of the Red Army.

Let me insist with all the earnestness I can command that these men, profoundly devoted as they were to their Soviet Fatherland, and employed, as they had been, over long years in preparing the Red Army for a decisive trial of strength, first with Poland and then with Germany, were psychologically incapable of committing the crimes imputed to them, and could not have done so even had they so wished. All the stories of sympathy with Germany, of plots, of Nazi conspiracies and the handing-over of military secrets, are elements in a shameful campaign of denigration which merely reflects upon the moral sense of those who invented it.

Both Alksnis and Hekker, too, come back to memory. The former, after getting his pilot's certificate and carrying out a number of daring flights up and down the country, became the chief of our air arm, which he proceeded to get into working order. He was said to be a strict disciplinarian and to have high standards of efficiency. He would himself inspect his flying officers, and woe to any of them who came on parade unshaved or improperly turned out! Not that he was naturally fussy or that he took the slightest interest in smartness *qua* smartness; but, as he explained to me himself, flying demands a constant attention to details, which can be inculcated only by rigid discipline. Headstrong he may have been, but he was a man of method, and brought a wholly new spirit into Soviet aviation. It is entirely owing to him that it is the extraordinarily powerful weapon it is to-day—though here, too, there is reason to fear that Alksnis's tragic end, followed by that of his principal collaborators and of the foremost constructional engineers, from the inventor Toupolèv down, may have struck it a blow from which recovery will be difficult. . . .

What lay behind Alksnis's downfall? By origin a Lett—it is common knowledge that the Letts played an important part in the early days of the Revolution—he disappeared at the same time as the last of his fellow countrymen to attain high positions: Eydeman and Kork, who were shot with Toukhatchevsky; Peters and Latsis, members of the Cheka at the time of the Red Terror; and Roudzoutak, who was a member of the Political Bureau. A former police chief, People's Commissar for Internal Affairs in some small Republic, was even arrested in Central Asia. Unfortunately for him, he was a Lett too, but he can hardly have expected, while he embraced the Trotskyist phantom, that he would be called upon to pay with his life for his enthusiasm. Other generals, all Letts, all influential but less well known than those I have named, perished a little later in circumstances just as mysterious—Bokis, Osolin, Apsé, Mesis. . . .

But to-day there is not a nook or cranny of the U.S.S.R. that has not given its quota to the hecatomb. . . .

Hekker was acting at this time as Voroshilov's Chef de Protocole or Master of Ceremonies, a job that demanded greater delicacy of handling than is usually supposed. The tactician, in him, and the political revolutionary were pushed into the background to give place to the military diplomat whose work was his only interest. I saw him several times at the various receptions I had to organise for the Turkish and Lithuanian delegations. He advised me, gave me tips about this and that individual, initiated me into the secrets of a rich and subtle psychology, and made sure that all the details were right. When I raised my glass to propose a toast in a few conventional phrases, I would see, at the far end of the table, his kindly eyes watching me with a vague anxiety. I felt then that I was still the little "Benjamin" of the College class of 1921. When, in 1935, I was preparing to leave for Greece, I went to pay him a farewell call. He had just been made a Corps Commander, and was wearing for the first time a new, heavily braided uniform of a pattern till then unknown in the Red Army. The reward given him for so many years of blameless service delighted him. He was surrounded by colleagues who joked good-humouredly with him on his promotion. He begged me to send him from Athens two yards of good-quality braid—which I solemnly did. It was untarnishable stuff, and he received it a short time before his arrest. . . .

My work brought me often in contact with the members of the Diplomatic Corps, with those especially who were accredited by Eastern Governments and by countries adjacent to them. Not only did I get to know the details of their work but I saw something of the social life they led in Moscow. The fifteen years which had passed since my association with Chicherin had brought many changes. All the Great Powers now had their representatives in the capital of the World Revolution.

The most outstanding personalities were, undoubtedly, Bullitt, Vassyf-Bey and Lukasiewicz, the ambassadors, respectively, of the United States, Turkey and Poland, though the most original figures were probably the Lithuanian minister, Baltrouchaitis (who had been a famous Russian poet before the war) and his military attaché, Colonel Scoutchas.

Diplomatic life in Moscow during these three years was rich in picturesque details and political interest, but for fear of overloading my book I must postpone describing it to some more suitable occasion.

Rosengoltz's coldness towards me became more and more marked. The staff was quick to notice it, and it hindered my work. I had a struggle to get the technical specialists I required, and my reports had a way of remaining unanswered. I sent in my resignation. I know that Rosengoltz got the letter, but for two months he made no reply, though we saw one another frequently. Nothing was further from my thoughts than that our collaboration was shortly to come to an end for ever. No one had the slightest idea, he least of all, of the terrible fate that awaited him.

Arkadi Pavlovitch Rosengoltz was little more than fifty. He had married a young women who had worked in his office, a jolly, red-haired girl. They had one child. Very imperfectly educated, and brought up in a religious household, she made him a present of a sacred medal, about which several questions were asked during his trial in Moscow. What had merely been a gesture of affection on the part of a frightened and bewildered woman was turned into a subject of scandal and used to prove that superstition was a dangerous weapon of counter-revolution! Rosengoltz and his wife lived in the Government Hostel close to the Kremlin. His daughter by a previous marriage committed suicide in the Caucasus during 1935. She was, in many ways, like her father. He lived a retired life, devoting his evenings to work. He was an excellent administrator with a strong feeling for authority, temperamentally a born bureaucrat, and devoted to Stalin. He had known Trotsky during the years of fighting, and had belonged to the Opposition from 1923 to 1928 at the time when it stood some chance of being successful. Since then, he had served Stalin without hesitation, holding that the régime he had instituted was the only possible one for Russia.

My resignation was finally accepted. While I was on holiday in the Caucasus at the new rest-house for generals which had been built at Sotchi, Vlassov, who had succeeded me as president of the Automobile Exportation Trust, was accused of criminal negligence a very few weeks after he had taken up the position. He had allowed a number of parachutes required by the Turkish Government for some sporting event to be dispatched—via Germany. Nothing is easier to sabotage than a parachute. Stalin, informed of what had occurred, had Vlassov put on trial, while a fresh consignment of parachutes was sent to Ankara by aeroplane over the Black Sea from the Crimea.

I asked leave to attend a course at the Flying College. My request was again refused by the Central Committee. Litvinov had me attached to the Foreign Office, and I was appointed First Secretary of Embassy at Athens.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FIRING-SQUADS OF MOSCOW ARE HEARD IN ATHENS

I BROKE the journey at Sofia where I stopped with Raskolnikov, U.S.S.R. minister to Bulgaria. I found him looking still young, living well, and generally happy. He was doing useful work in Bulgaria, where his astute handling of affairs was having the result of enlisting Slav sentiment in the Balkans on the side of Russia. He was moving from success to success. During his hours of leisure he was writing a novel, for this former commander of the Red flotillas on the Volga and the Caspian was also a fine dramatic author. His *Robespierre* had been produced with success in a Moscow theatre. Raskolnikov and his wife, like himself a former militant Communist, can scarcely have suspected, as we walked together in the garden of the Legation, that their lot would soon be comparable to that of the last Jacobins, proscribed, massacred, or forced to flee. It is generally known that the conqueror of Kazan and of Enzeli, recalled at the beginning of 1938, refused to return to Russia. I had occasion, during my visit, to tell him that his military operations at Enzeli, in 1920, had determined my whole life by turning my thoughts to the possibility of a revolutionary career in the East. . . .

The train stopped for a few minutes in a very ordinary little station. There was nothing to be seen but a newspaper-stand. My eyes caught a magic name—Thebes. . . . I had left Sofia still under snow, but Athens was bright with sun. It seemed quiet and restful after the noise and bustle and wearisome routine of Moscow.

Greece was going through a period of sudden changes.

Within a short space of time several régimes had come and gone. A forceful soldier, the son of peasant parents and a former friend of Venizelos, General Kondylis, had made himself dictator. Against him his old friends organised the Venizelist insurrection of March 1935 which he had to put down. Their attempt to rally the forces of Republicanism failed. The country, at this time, was almost equally divided between the Monarchists under M. Tsaldaris, and the Republicans who still stood by M. Venizelos. Kondylis, thinking that he controlled the situation, assumed the title of Regent and recalled the exiled King, George II, from London. The latter, brought up in the English Liberal school, and a better politician than his mayor of the palace, saw that the best chance of stabilising his throne lay in an attempted pacification of parties. He insisted on granting an amnesty to the Venizelists, re-establishing political liberty, holding democratic elections, and coming to an agreement with the Republicans—in other words, on putting an end to the dictatorship of Kondylis. Very coldly he accepted the general's resignation, and conferred the presidency of the Council on a prudent old lawyer, Professor Demerdzis. The exiles returned from the islands, the Communist Party was once again made legal, and its daily paper, *Rizospastis*, reappeared. Kondylis died suddenly—perhaps of a broken heart. Venizelos vanished from public life into self-imposed banishment. Tsaldaris and Demerdzis were also cut off by death. In the course of a single year Greece had lost its three most representative statesmen. In the gap which they had left the shadow of Metaxas, the future dictator, slowly took substance.

At the moment of my arrival in Athens, in the last days of 1935, the Greek monarchy seemed anything but assured. Our minister Kobetsky and I went to the palace to offer the King our New Year's wishes. It gave the impression of being not yet really inhabited. A Master of Ceremonies introduced the members of the Diplomatic Corps. The King shook our hands and spoke a few words to each. George II, very English in his appearance and manners, impressed me as a man of strong character. He was clean shaven, with well-marked features, and wore a monocle. In one year I saw him establish on a firm basis a monarchy which, at the time of his return, general opinion had considered perilous in the extreme. Little by little he turned a dream into a reality. The palace was freshly furnished, royal cars drove through the streets of Athens, a mounted guard dressed in national costume was formed, a number of impressive reviews were held, a court took form, the crowds got into the habit of cheering in the streets, and the dictatorship of Metaxas came into being with a stronger backing than that of Kondylis. In short, the King did his job seriously and effectively.

I followed with interest the work of the first Parliament of the reconstituted monarchy. The Tsaldarist and the Venizelist members were in about equal strength, and the Communists with their fifteen seats were in a position to swing divisions which way they liked. Abandoning the class war, they set themselves, here as elsewhere, to build up the policy of the Popular Front, and came to a working agreement with the Venizelists. Their votes determined the election of the Venizelist leader to the presidency of the Chamber.

The King, in accordance with the rules of the Parliamentary game, suggested to this leader, M. Sofoulis, the establishment of a Government drawn from the two chief parties. But it was found impossible to reach an understanding. The efforts of the diehards, and the still living memory of past battles, stood in the way of any agreement.

Discussions which came to nothing dragged out, and slowly the very existence of Parliamentary government became jeopardised. Decisive events were being prepared outside. In the huge hall of the ancient palace the best orators of the parties, Sofoulis, Kafandaris and Papanastasiou, poured out their brilliant eloquence. Leaning with his elbows on the Government bench, Metaxas, obviously bored and irritated, listened to the charges and criticisms of the various speakers. The members of the Diplomatic Corps who had been present at the opening, no longer attended the debates. I was almost always alone in the Diplomats' Gallery, where I sat accustoming my ears to the musical language of Greece, and grasping with difficulty the fine points of the deputies' speeches.

On the 4th August Parliament was dissolved. The Popular Front died before it was born. The constitutional régime of the kingdom had had no time to grow to its full stature, and was suspended for a long period.

There was little work for us at the Legation or in the Commercial Mission, both of which were housed under the same roof. We had an excellent opportunity of doing a good stroke of business by selling Soviet wheat to Greece, in exchange for Corinth raisins offered on exceptional terms, but it would have meant infringing one of the strict rules of the Department of External Commerce that all exports must be paid for in cash. Moscow categorically refused to sanction the transaction, and so red tape was the cause of our losing a considerable sum of money. By this time I was beyond feeling surprise at anything. I regarded my diplomatic appointment as a rest-cure that was turning out to be unexpectedly agreeable. Kobetsky was a charming man who hated complications, a voluble fellow who knew how to appreciate comfort and the beauties of the Hellenic scene. We made a number of excursions, preferably by car, without ever getting tired of the country, the ruins and the heavenly sea. Our diplomatic labours left us plenty of time to savour the delights of these trips and the loveliness of the landscape.

I don't mean to say that we did no work, or that we took no interest in politics. We certainly kept at it quite as much as the other Legations. But I must beg the pardon of those of my readers who expected to find this chapter full of sensational revelations of the activities of the O.G.P.U. in Athens, or of the secrets of Greco-Soviet diplomacy. I cannot satisfy their curiosity. The Legation, properly speaking, had nothing to do with the work of the O.G.P.U., and neither Kobetsky nor I knew anything about it. As to professional diplomatic matters, in the interests of my Fatherland, betrayed though it may have been by Stalin, and from a sense of loyalty to the country to which I was accredited, and the memories of which are linked in my mind with a decisive period in my life, I feel obliged to maintain a discreet silence.

The Soviet papers reported so little of what was really happening that the sinister years which followed the assassination of Kirov, with its mass executions, its deportations, its never-ceasing repression, passed for us in conditions of almost idyllic calm. Life in Russia was doubtless finding its normal level. I told myself that it would take time for old wounds to heal and for the people to forget the bitter privations which had marked the period of the first Five Years' Plan. Doubtless I deliberately deceived myself into forgetting the things I had seen and guessed. Had I not done so I should never have slept of nights. Why shouldn't I admit that I was trying to escape from my own thoughts?

One day in August 1936 the storm burst from a clear sky. The Zinoviev–Kaménev trial was to open in five days. The two former members of the Political Bureau, having admitted a vague "moral responsibility" for the attempt made by Nikolaev against Kirov in 1934, had been treated with implacable harshness. They had been imprisoned for ten years, and their political friends had been deported or interned by thousands in concentration camps. This time it was to be the end. Stalin had seized the chance of getting rid of possible competitors. The articles printed in the Moscow papers left no doubt about what was to be the upshot of the trial. Every line contained an allusion to the death penalty. But none of us could believe it. Kobetsky, once Zinoviev's secretary and protégé, grew visibly older in a few days. He maintained a gloomy silence, and spent the time smoking alone in his office and listening to the radio. During the progress of the trial the atmosphere of a bad dream grew ever thicker, until the whole thing seemed mad, incredible, without rhyme or reason. . . . It was no longer a question even of pretending to believe the "confessions" so obviously dictated by the Political Bureau to serve as a basis for an anti-Trotsky agitation, but rather of finding some intelligible reason for this monstrous business, the only effect of which must be utterly to demoralise the Soviet system and the Communist cause throughout the world. We all thought that the unbelievable depths of humiliation to which the Sixteen had sunk would at least save them from the firing-squad. After all, had they not been Lenin's friends and Stalin's comrades?

I went over the various precedents in my mind. The great trials of the Revolution had never ended in executions. The one in which the Socialist Revolutionary Party had been involved in 1922 had produced a conditional death sentence at most, although the accused had made civil war against the State and fired on Lenin. The trial of the Chakhty engineers, accused of sabotage, had, it is true, sent a few men to their deaths, but only when they had been found guilty of espionage. The prisoners in the Ramsin affair, who had pleaded guilty of plotting with the French General Staff to bring about armed intervention in Russia, had been pardoned and were now reinstated. The Social Democrats who had figured in the next big case, and on similar charges, had got off with long terms of imprisonment. The Thornton trial in 1933—a suspicious business (I had been in court at the time)—produced a crop of very mild punishments. No, Stalin would never bring himself to spill the blood of his former comrades, of the men with whom he had worked for so many years, of men who ranked among the oldest leaders of the Party and of the October Revolution. Such an eventuality was not possible. But why was he making them tell so many lies? Was it that he hoped by such a smoke-screen to disguise the truth? One piece of news brought me momentary comfort. The right of appealing for mercy to the Executive Chief of the Soviets, which had been abolished after the Kirov affair, had been restored on the very eve of the present trial, evidently in the interests of Zinoviev and his fellow prisoners. What reason had we for thinking that it was only a trap? I should have held any man guilty of insulting the Party who had told me that Stalin was preparing in cold blood to do away with those at whose side he had faced the battle and steered the State.

There are no words to describe the silence that fell upon us when news of the executions came through. We none of us dared to say anything even in a whisper. We lacked the courage to look one another in the eyes. I felt that this meant the end of a chapter in my life. Something was lost now which I should never recover, the fundamental belief in the justice of a cause.

Poor Kobetsky, whose close bonds of work and friendship with Zinoviev were known to all of us, remained completely silent. He seemed crushed. But he had, for all that, to do his duty—summon the Communists, read them a statement on what had happened, tell them to pass a resolution approving the sentence of the court. He shut himself up in his office where he wrote out a statement which he read to us in a perfectly expressionless voice. All the terms officially required were there: "offscourings of humanity", "shot like mad dogs", "the wise leadership of our beloved Chief", "extermination of the Trotskyist vermin". It was torture for Kobetsky to have to read this paper to us; it was torture for us to have to listen to it. Nobody made a sign. The resolution was unanimously adopted without a show of hands; and each of us was left to his own deep sense of remorse.

A few days later the papers published a dispatch from Moscow announcing the recall of several Soviet diplomats whose reputations had been compromised: Davtian, Raskolnikov, Kobetsky. . . . Kobetsky turned as white as a sheet; there was a tense expression on his face; he spoke not a word. He sent a telegram to Litvinov demanding to have the offensive statement contradicted, or to be recalled at once. Litvinov sent no contradiction, but replied: "Remain at your post and await orders". . . . The normal course of our days apparently returned, but the weight that hung upon our spirits was something that I cannot describe in words. Each mail from Moscow brought us lists, drawn up for the guidance of the librarians and secretaries of the Party cells, of books which must be immediately burned. In all cases they were those which contained references to the theorists, the Marxist writers, or the men of letters who were held to be compromised by the recent trials. Since every man who had been involved in the first or second of the Plans that had been put into operation over the past fifteen years was already compromised, I asked myself with amazement what there would be left for U.S.S.R.

libraries to put on their shelves! It was quite enough for a classic work to have a preface by Bukharin or Radek or Kaménev—to the flames with it! . . . "At this rate," I thought, "we shall burn more books than the Nazis—and more by Marxist authors!" A large number of Marx's own books were condemned, because they had been edited by Riazanov who was deported some while ago. The first edition of Lenin's works was withdrawn from circulation. . . .

Our ordinary diplomatic duties were slowed down considerably, or stopped altogether. We received no more Circular Letters on the general political situation. We were sent no explanations of anything. I had been amazed to see how, during the Italo–Ethiopian conflict, the U.S.S.R. which was stated officially to be in sympathy with Ethiopia, went on supplying petrol to Italy without thinking it necessary to issue from the Central Office the slightest explanation for the use of Party members. The civil war broke out in Spain, and the U.S.S.R. abstained from any act that could have been interpreted as throwing in its lot with the victims of aggression. . . . When Stalin decided to pursue an active policy in Spain and sent as his envoy to that country the unfortunate Rosenberg, formerly Chargé d'Affaires in Paris, and later delegate to the League of Nations, I received from Krestinsky a telegram announcing my appointment as Consul-General in Alicante. That was on 3rd November, 1936. I was spared the necessity of taking up this post, for it was suppressed a few days later when the Spanish Government, and with it the Soviet Legation, was transferred to Valencia.

Two significant facts marked, for me, the death of King George the Fifth of England. For the first time the Department of Foreign Affairs instructed us to be represented at the religious service to which we were invited. I went with Kobetsky. A curious crowd looked at the red flag on our car as it drew up in front of the Cathedral, and at us, as we entered the building dressed in formal black. A few days later we received from the British minister, Sir Sydney Waterlow, the thanks of his new Sovereign, Edward VIII. The same post brought us a number of English magazines containing photographs of the ceremony in London. Toukhatchevsky figured in them among the generals and princes who followed the Royal coffin. He was walking beside a young general whose name I remembered—Franco, representing the Spanish Republic. . . .

Their very different destinies (and Stalin's too) sets one thinking about the justice of Providence. But whatever conclusions one is tempted to draw, no dishonour could possibly attach to the unfortunate marshal.

CHAPTER XXVI

MY LAST VISIT TO RUSSIA

IN December 1936 I decided to spend some weeks of my leave in Moscow, and to make the journey by car. The Balkan roads are impassable at this time of year, so I went via Italy, Austria, Czechslovakia and Poland, the whole distance, from Brindisi to Moscow, amounting to 4,500 kilometres. The idea had been in the back of my mind for a long time. My adventurous winter drive from Leningrad to Moscow in 1933 had not cured me of my passion.

Kobetsky and my other friends at the Legation did their best to dissuade me, pointing out the risks I should run on a drive through Russia and Poland. No one, it was true, had tried that particular road in winter. They prophesied that I should never arrive, that I should smash my car to pieces and have to abandon it on the road, or that I should get snowed up. But I thought their fears exaggerated and decided to trust to my prowess as a sportsman.

From what the Soviet papers said, I answered, the road scheme had provided for the construction of a speed-way from the Polish frontier as far as Moscow, This was due to be finished by November. The worst part of my journey, therefore, would be covered on a good road. In spite of bitter experience, I still believed what the papers said. Perhaps I should find someone to go with me at one of the Legations which I planned to visit on the way.

Having severely cut down my expenses during the year, I had been able to order a new small Ford from America which was now my own personal property. Owing to the risks of the trip I didn't like to make use of the Legation

GREECE: THE TURKISH MINISTER AND HIS WIFE, M. KOBETSKY AND MYSELF

A WAYSIDE CHURCH

car in which I drove about Athens. The new car arrived from America a few days before I was due to start, and on the 14th December, after feverish preparations, and equipped with numerous spare parts, I embarked at the Piræus.

Very early in the morning I went up on deck to take a last look at Hellas. The sky was overcast; now and again weak flashes of sunlight pierced the curtain of grey cloud, touching the mountainous coast-line of Epirus with those soft, tender and translucent colours which, of all the things that I had seen in Greece, I loved and wondered at the most. But such a sight was rare. The sunlit days were few, and, as a rule, the mountains remained dark and melancholy. At midday we entered the Gulf of Ithaca—home of Ulysses—and cast anchor close to a lovely little town built on the very edge of the magnificent bay. In the middle of the latter stood a fort upon a tiny island looking rather like Bourdzi in the Gulf of Nauplia. The name of the town was Vathy. From Ithaca we set a course for Corfu where we arrived that evening. I was struck by the town's similarity in appearance to the Italian cities of the Mediterranean, except that the wild picturesqueness of the landscape was modified by a sense of calm and a purity of line and natural feature, characteristic of the Hellenic scene. Next day our ship steamed into the huge harbour of Brindisi.

I covered the 700 kilometres between Brindisi and Rome in a single day. It was rather cold, but the sun was bright, and the scenery through which the road passed offered great variety especially in the mountain district beyond Foggia. Small country cottages, built in a style peculiar to themselves, alternated with wretched tenement buildings, the peeling walls of which were covered with the usual slogans proclaiming the greatness of the Duce and of the new Roman Empire. I did not get out of the car until I reached Naples, and there only for ten minutes, to take an "espresso", and to spend a few minutes admiring the Bay of Naples by night. As I was approaching Rome about midnight, I got into a terrible fog which was so thick that I had to slow down to 10 kilometres an hour to avoid colliding with the great lorries, carrying vegetables to the Rome market, which loomed constantly out of the mist. I could not see more than ten yards ahead, and the drive became dangerous and unpleasant. After fourteen hours at the wheel, I unexpectedly found myself in the wide Roman streets. They were silent and ominous. The fog seemed as thick as ever. The Eternal City was wrapped in a shroud of vapour through which showed vaguely the vast bulk of the Coliseum. At the Soviet Embassy a sleepy porter showed me into the guest-room where, after a hot bath, I slept like the dead. My two days in Rome were like a dream—a happy meeting with an old friend. At Milan I attended a conference called by our ambassador in Italy, Boris Stein, to discuss the League meeting from which he had just returned, and the foreign policy of Litvinov. Stein spoke as a loyal and enthusiastic official. He was full of rather ponderous praise for Litvinov and Stalin. To such a pitch had the "proper way of speaking" been brought already even among intimates.

I fed the pigeons on the Piazza San Marco and crossed the Brenner covered in winter snow. The journey became more severe, but it was always full of interest. The Alps and the great Austrian motor road are not the most comfortable places to be in when there are avalanches about, but the views were splendid. The descent from Semmering after dark, when frost has turned the road surface to ice and the driver is new to the locality, is not to be recommended to amateurs with weak nerves. I came through all right thanks to the chains with which

I had had my wheels fitted. Later, I was to bless them still more fervently for the services they rendered me on the roads of Poland and White Russia.

At Vienna, in the house of our minister, Lorenz, I met a number of Soviet officers and high officials on their way to Spain. I imagine that they are paying to-day for the defeats of the Republic, except, perhaps, those of them who bought their own safety by arranging in Barcelona and Madrid for the murder of any revolutionary or soldier who happened to be anti-Stalin in sympathy.

Poland was to put me to a still harder test. At Vienna any hope I may have had of finding a travelling companion finally vanished. I heard again much talk of danger, of the impossibility of reaching Moscow in winter, and I was advised, in the most friendly fashion, to finish my trip by train.

Conditions were, in fact, very bad. During the two days it took me to get to Cracow, and from there on, as far as Warsaw, I encountered a terrific storm of melting snow accompanied by fearful winds. In places the road was frozen and slippery, in others a yard deep in snow. Beyond Cracow my headlights refused to function, and I drove on in complete darkness. It was all very exhausting, but though, at times, my courage was hard put to it, I never for a moment entertained the idea of giving up. My only fear was that I should not reach Moscow by the end of the month, and so should be prevented from carrying out my promise of spending the New Year with my sons.

The landscape through which I drove was beautiful if unexciting: the hills covered in white, the empty fields abandoned. Now and again I stopped in the middle of this great loneliness. In front and behind there was nothing to be seen but the long road between its avenue of great trees, and white fields, the surface of which was broken by an occasional note of black. The wind whistled and lifted the snow in fine eddies. The road was empty of life but for a few crows hopping clumsily before the car. For a little relaxation, I turned on the radio and the muffled sound of orchestral playing went well with the cold quietness.

On Christmas Eve I reached Warsaw through gusts of wind-blown snow. I was the guest of Davtian and of his wife, the actress Maksakova. Like many other Russian officials, the ambassador to Poland was, without knowing it, enjoying his last hours of liberty, actually the last days of his life. . . .

After leaving Warsaw I entered a district of Jewish villages which seemed to have lain there crushed from all eternity by a weight of abject misery.

The roads became bad, but the weather, despite the extreme cold, remained calm. I was now within sight of the end of the four-thousandth kilometre of my journey, and began to be conscious of the effects of prolonged fatigue. I hoped to cross the Russian frontier before dark.

Two Polish sentries hidden in a ditch beside the road emerged suddenly from the gloom and made signs to me to stop. A few hundred yards farther on an officer came out of the frontier guard-room. He was affable but firm. There was no possibility of my being let through that evening. The regulations were very stringent on the point that no one must be allowed across the frontier after sundown. Besides, the Soviet guards would not come, however loudly they were summoned.

The upshot was that I had to go back twenty miles and spend the night in a village.

I found a room in the house of a Jewess, standing in the market-place. Space was made for my car in a barn among farm wagons, cows and goats. The local constable came to have a look at me and spent a long time poring over my papers. Next morning, in a frost of over 20 degrees, I started off once again. The officer with one of the sentries accompanied me to the frontier. The wind cut us to the bone, making the cold seem even more intense than it was. I stopped the car in front of a frozen stream over which there was a small bridge. This bridge was closed by two bars of wood. Those on our side were painted in the Polish colours—red and white. Behind the farther one, which was of a richer red, stretched the endless territories of the U.S.S.R.

At an order from the officer, the soldier fired twice in the air. We waited five minutes, ten, a quarter of an hour. There was not a sound from the farther side. The hutment of freshly sawn wood, standing on a hill about a kilometre distant, and belonging to the Soviet troops, appeared to be uninhabited.

The Polish officer had turned quite blue from the cold. In an irritable voice he began to complain:

"Your fellows ought to repeat the signal and then come along here. But it's always the same; whenever they're wanted you can't get them out of their huts."

Two more shots were fired, then another. At the end of an hour, by which time we were completely frozen, we heard a faint rifle-shot—a reply to our numerous summonses. Two figures in military greatcoats appeared on the road. A young officer of the Soviet frontier guard approached slowly. He cast a surprised glance at the car, and saluted the Polish captain, who handed over my passport and seemed inclined to hasten the formalities. Our representative, visibly embarrassed, turned my passport over and over in his fingers.

"My commanding officer is absent, and I don't think I can let you through until he comes back. I think it would be better to wait." He hesitated.

The Polish officer turned to me, making a clucking sound with his tongue, and with the beginnings of an ironic smile on his lips.

"You see—always the same old story!"

"We'll send for the officer in command . . ." stammered the young subaltern, turning very red.

I cut through his hesitations.

"Open the barrier at once, comrade!" I said. "My papers are in order, and it's your duty to carry out instructions without keeping these neighbours of ours waiting. Don't make this gentleman hang about all day. Any explanations you want from me can wait until we've reached your headquarters."

The tone of my voice produced its effect. I got back into my car and crossed the bridge. On our way to the frontier post, the young guard began to excuse himself. For several weeks now no one had passed the frontier. The officer in charge had gone off to pay a visit to the president of the local Soviet. The arrival of a car in the middle of winter was an entirely unexpected event. The last car they had seen—belonging to an English diplomat—had passed during August, and in that case Moscow had been warned by telegram of its impending arrival. They'd never dreamed that anyone would undertake such a journey at that time of year.

At the frontier post my reception was comparatively cordial. The commanding officer put in an appearance after a while; the little misunderstanding was cleared up. I left almost at once. I had received a piece of news which irritated me: the new speed-way which should, by rights, have been completed, was scarcely more than begun.[1] I had to use a series of older roads. These, it is true, were excellent in spots, but elsewhere their condition made me despair. For no apparent reason, a good stretch would suddenly end, and give place to one of incredible badness. I understood only too well what sort of a thing the old Mongolian "road torture" had been! A few miles from Minsk, my Ford got into a drift more than a yard deep. It was five o'clock in the morning and snow was falling steadily. It was impossible to see anything. For two hours not a car, not a cart, not a man, came anywhere near me. My feet in their thin shoes were completely frozen. I could no longer feel them. Taking my shoes off I began rubbing them hard with snow in order to get the blood circulating. At the end of an hour I had to start the operation all over again, and I had begun to despair when a figure at last appeared upon the road. It was that of a poor man of middle age, a wallet on his back, walking through the vast emptiness. He told me there was a *kolkhoze* about two kilometres distant. I set off thither to get help, and succeeded in finding the place, a huddle of stuffy hovels, swarming with children and peasants in the last stages of poverty, and thick with animal stenches. The men were capable of doing the job I wanted, and managed to harness the car to a team of emaciated horses, though they had some difficulty in making up a full set of harness. There was an abandoned air about the stables. "There's a shortage of straps," they explained. "You know how difficult it is to get a piece of leather. . . ."

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[1] According to statements appearing in the Soviet Press during the summer of 1938, this "speed-way" is still in course of constructionwill and not be finished until 1939—instead of in November 1936! Such facts explain the reticence of the Russian newspapers in the matter of results and figures relating to the annual plans both in industry and in building.

I spent the next night at Roslavl. During the afternoon of the 31st December I reached the capital by the Podolysky road. I remembered the accident I had had just as I had finished my journey four years previously, and drove with exaggerated care through the Moscow streets. Policemen and passers-by looked with astonishment at the foreign number-plate of my car with its Athenian registration marks—ΔΣ (delta-sigma).

I rang up the Foreign Office and parked my car an hour later in the garage of the Spiridonievka Private Hotel where Litvinov was living.

I was proud of my trip. Looking back, I realised the difficulties I had surmounted and felt pleased at the thought that I had got through. I understood better now the state of mind which leads motorists to prefer dangerous routes to the regular tourist roads—an attitude which, till then, I had always regarded as a species of snobbery.

I was pleased, too, to think that I had reached my goal without having to abandon the car. The only damage was a broken ceiling lamp which I had banged with my head. Otherwise the car was as good as when I had taken delivery of it at Athens. I left it in Litvinov's garage and never saw it again. It was confiscated by the Government along with all my other Moscow property after my resignation from the service seven months later.

My arrival in Moscow took place three weeks before the takov trial. No one, even in the most intimate conations, mentioned politics. Many well-known figures disappeared mysteriously—arrested, of course. Even eir names—referred to by mistake in the course of conversation—produced a feeling of awkwardness: those present pretending not to have heard. . . . Just as those afflicted with mortal illnesses cling, until the last moment, to empty hopes, the influential Communists, in spite of everything, put their trust in an ultimate return to normal conditions, and buried themselves in the work they happened to be doing.

I was anxious to get some information about the Zinoviev trial, but I had to wait for a favourable opportunity and use extreme caution. I met a man whom I had known pretty intimately, a journalist who was well in with Stalin's immediate entourage and had access to the Dictator himself. To him I put my questions. He had told me that a formal promise of reprieve had been given to the sixteen prisoners in the case, on condition that they made the confessions demanded of them and sacrificed their personal honour as a proof of their loyalty to the Party and their readiness to fight Trotskyism. To convince them of the genuineness of the offer, they were told of the decree, authorising an appeal which had been promulgated five days before the trial. Knowing Stalin, they were sceptical; but they had no real choice in the matter. The atmosphere of the court, the campaign in the Press, the meetings at which everyone, from children of under twelve to academicians who had grown white in the service of science, had demanded the death penalty against these "mad Fascist dogs", made it clear to them that they were lost if they accepted the bargain. But it was too late; there was nothing left for them to do but drain the cup to the dregs, in other words to take a last gamble by obeying Stalin's orders though the position was hopeless. It should, I think, be added that, with two exceptions, none of them had ever been Trotskyists, and would have fought against Trotskyism with a certain amount of good will.

Trotsky has expressed surprise in his book on the trial (*The Crimes of Stalin*) that the accused should have found it possible to confess that the only thing that had influenced them was "lust for power".

"For the Party of the proletariat," writes Trotsky, "power is only a means to the transformation of society. To seek power for power's sake is a proof of stupidity and vulgarity beyond words. . . ." My interlocutor of the *Pravda* made me realise that it was on this point precisely that Kaménev and Zinoviev had tried desperately to unmask Stalin at the bar of public opinion.

"They denied that they had ever had any programme, any political platform, different from Stalin's. . . . All they had striven for was power—get that clear!"—the member of the *Pravda* staff indignantly explained to me; "and the judges, the State Prosecutor Vichinsky, and the journalists accepted that version of the case! We wrote to the effect that their hunger for power had landed them in the last indignity—the loss of all ideals. It was a clever trick, and it set the tone of the whole trial."

I still didn't understand.

"But don't you see! If they were not in disagreement with Stalin in the matter of the Party attitude, and had striven only for power, that meant that Stalin himself was in general agreement with them, and had worked solely for his personal position. What it all meant was obviously that they no longer believed in him as a mouthpiece of the politics of the Party, and that Stalin showed himself willing to send the friends of Lenin to death simply to bolster up his own authority! This line of argument completely upset all the Boss's plans. As a matter of fact, so sure was he of the outcome of the trial, that he had gone off for a holiday in the Caucasus. Informed by telegram and by the newspaper accounts of the manœuvre staged by the accused, he was furious. He wired back, emptying the vials of his wrath on the court, on the O.G.P.U., on Yagoda who had been blind to the perfidy of Zinoviev and Kaménev, on us of the *Pravda* and the *Izvestia*, because we had fallen into the trap. We all trembled for our skins, and, of course, there was an immediate change in tactics. The *Pravda* proceeded to inveigh against the villainy of traitors who had sold themselves abroad, who were preparing the restoration of Capitalism, and dared plead nothing but a personal lust for power. The State Prosecutor took the same line. It was too late now to get out of the accused a version which psychologically should be more in accord with the wishes of the Boss. The trial had missed fire, and the fate of

Yagoda, who had been chiefly responsible for staging it, was settled. Eight years previously Yagoda had been in sympathy with Bukharin. The Boss forgets nothing. Yagoda was relieved of his post, sent to the P.T.T., and replaced by Ejov."

I learned that the librarians of Moscow were more closely watched and more constantly threatened than any other class of citizens. (And to think that I had once thought of becoming a librarian because it would mean a peaceful job!) The libraries were being constantly subjected to purges. The files of official newspapers—there are no others—covering the past year, had become forbidden reading matter. If a librarian refused to show some inquiring visitor the back numbers of the *Izvestia* he might be accused of sabotage. But those back numbers contained signed articles by men now branded as enemies of the people! If he *did* show them, he ran the risk of being accused of counter-revolutionary sympathies! If he referred the matter to his superiors he could always be accused of setting a trap!

On two occasions I saw Krestinsky and Doletsky, the director of the *Tass* Press agency—our *Havas*. On the first occasion they were still, both of them, normal men, preoccupied naturally, but capable of smiling, of joking, of making plans, of giving advice. Three weeks later they were gloomy and nervous, so absorbed in their own affairs that they spoke in dismal tones, seemed inattentive, and hardly understood what was said to them. They felt themselves to be men condemned. The Piatakov trial, not yet announced in the papers, was to take place in a few days' time. Hundreds of arrests were being made daily of those in positions of authority. . . . It is known that Doletsky, several of whose colleagues figured in the Piatakov trial, was actually arrested at this time. If rumour speaks truly, he killed himself in prison. He was a Communist of long standing and of Polish origins, a conscientious official, and the kind of man who had never got himself involved in political quarrels.

I went to take leave of Krestinsky the very day of my departure from Moscow, at the end of January, two days before the opening of the Piatakov trial. He was so tired and so depressed that, in talking of our mission in Greece, he would forget to finish his sentences. He said he was overwrought, and bade me farewell. "I have taken all necessary steps in regard to your family," he remarked; and then: "How is Kobetsky?"

A few days later I was told that the Central Committee had relieved him of his duties as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The last time that Krestinsky spoke in public was at a meeting of the Communists of the Department. Speaking very slowly, and obviously very much moved, he said that although he was wholly committed to the general line of the Party which he had served conscientiously for many years, he realised that his record as a member of the Opposition from 1923–7 made t advisable that, in the present circumstances, he should be retired. Men at the head of foreign affairs in the U.S.S.R. should enjoy the absolute confidence of the country and should be able to show a stainless past in the Bolshevik camp. He knew that, nine years before, he had committed the grave fault of joining the Opposition elements which had set themselves up against the Leninist wisdom of our chief, Stalin. He approved, without reservation, the decision of the Central Committee, which, for that reason, had given him a new position in the Department of Justice. The loyal Communist must learn to serve his country where the Party thinks best to send him. Krestinsky thanked his former colleagues, old and young, assured them that he would never forget them, and asked them to devote all their energies to the service of the Party. . . . He must have known that his change of employment was but a halting-place on his way to prison, and that prison meant ultimate death. There had been too many examples to leave him in any doubt.

Stalin's methods of procedure, not realised in civilised countries, consist in staging a progressive series of measures, the effect of which is to separate the victim, first of all, from his normal surroundings, from the men, that is, who know him and could vouch for his innocence. Yagoda went from the Department of the Interior to that of the P.T.T.—a regular ante-room of death. Four People's Commissars of the P.T.T. have been shot: Ivan Rykov, and Yagoda. . . . Krestinsky was arrested shortly after his appointment to the Department of Justice. Antonov-Ovséenko, Consul-General of the U.S.S.R. in Barcelona, where his intrigues resulted in riots and assassinations the effect of which was to weaken the Spanish Republic in its struggle against the enemy, was officially promoted People's Commissar for Justice in Russia, and told to return in order to take up his new functions. He took ship and may have landed at Odessa. However that may be he never reached his new post. He was arrested somewhere in the course of his journey, and that was the end of him. The Portfolio of Justice was merely a bait to tempt him into the trap. A number of Red generals, including Marshal Toukhatchevsky, received movement orders, left in special railway coaches for their new commands, but never arrived. They were suddenly arrested *en route* and were executed.

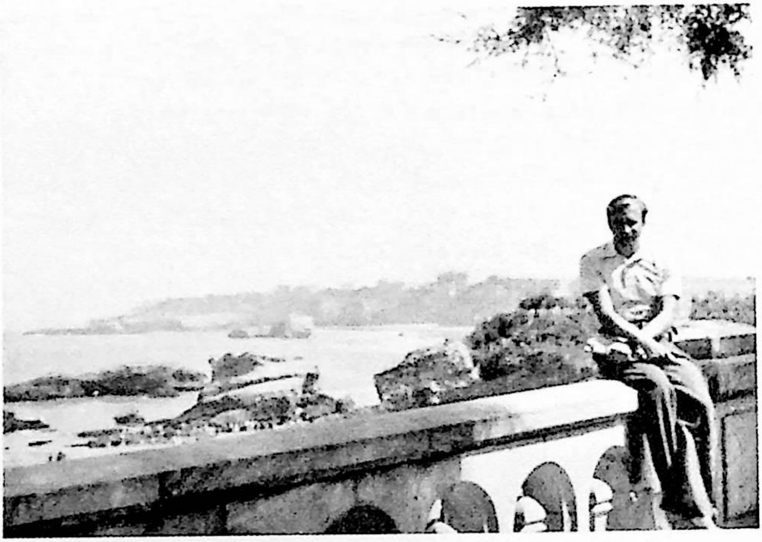
Moscow had fallen a prey to a new evil—espionage. The papers published articles on the subject which invariably ended with an appeal for vigilance. There was a distinct tendency to regard all foreigners, even Communists and revolutionary refugees who had been living in the U.S.S.R. for fifteen years, as spies. People grew afraid to know foreigners, to receive postcards from abroad. To show the lengths to which the Government went to inject the country with spy-mania, let me quote the case of the writer Pavlenko, a young Communist novelist of ability. Pavlenko had written a novel called *En Orient*, dealing with the Chinese Communists. (This book appeared in a French translation with the title *La cité dans la Taiga*.) The story begins in the following way. On the banks of the river Amor a Chinese Communist is shot by Japanese soldiers. Just before the fatal volley, the victim lets himself fall alive—instead of dead—into the stream. Swimming under water, fired on by the squad and covered with blood, he succeeds in reaching the Soviet bank. Help comes; he recovers, studies in a Soviet military school, becomes a Red officer, returns to his own country and covers himself with glory fighting with a small revolutionary detachment. These are the kind of incidents of which the novel is full. It had a certain success. One day a cinema poster with the same title *En Orient* caught my attention. "A film," I read, "based on a scenario by Pavlenko." The film began in the same way as the book, but the end was quite different. The Chinese Communist, welcomed by his Russian brothers and admitted as student to a military school, is suddenly unmasked! Actually, he is nothing but a Japanese spy! The lesson to be drawn is that it is not enough to have been shot and to have survived by a miracle, to escape suspicion. The last days that I spent in that land of suspicion were extremely painful.

On my way back I met two more men who were to be condemned shortly afterwards. One of these was our new minister in Lithuania, Podolsky. We were in the same express train, for he was on his way to take up his duties at Kaunas. He disappeared some months later and is believed to have been shot. At Budapest I stayed with our ambassador, Beksadian, an old acquaintance and an excellent fellow who lived surrounded by collections which were evidence of the taste which had brought them together: objects of art, valuable books, etc. He had, too, a cellar full of the very best Hungarian wines. . . . He was recalled without any explanation and has since disappeared.

At Athens, Kobetsky was drawing near his end. The execution of Zinoviev had broken his spirit, and he no longer seemed able to resist the physical disease—cancer of the stomach—which was eating his life away. He handed over to me and returned to Moscow to die, in the Kremlin clinic, a natural death—by special favour of Providence.

So great was our need of illusions and of faith that the Piatakov trial threw us into the same state of terror as the Zinoviev trial had done in August 1936. This time, surely, Stalin would refrain from shedding blood. Piatakov had been his faithful colleague since the early days of the first Five Years' Plan. All Russia knew what a debt the finances and the industrialisation of the country owed to this indefatigable administrator. Ordjonikidzé, a member of the Political Bureau, and People's Commissar for Heavy Industries, would never let his friend and assistant, Mouralov, be shot. The records of Sérébriakov and Bogouslavsky were of epic stature. Drobnis, a hero of the Civil War, had already been shot once by the Whites and had recovered from his wounds only by a miracle. . . . But the appalling news duly arrived: all executed with the exception of Radek, Sokolnikov, and some quite unimportant secondary character. Why had these three been spared?—to offer a loophole to those accused in future trials. In the course of the proceedings, the name of Marshal Toukhatchevsky had been mentioned by Radek. What had been said had been harmless enough, but merely to see a well-known name referred to in these cases made one shudder. General Poutna, Toukhatchevsky's colleague and our military attaché in London, was held guilty of having conspired with the Trotskyists. . . . That meant the end for Poutna, whose wretched wife and child heard of his arrest only when they reached Warsaw on their way home. It was an omen of evil for Toukhatchevsky. Fresh warning of his approaching end reached us when we learned that, after having been designated official representative at the Coronation of George VI in London, he had been informed that the appointment was cancelled, and that the much less distinguished Admiral Orlov was to go in his stead. . . . Since then Orlov has met the same fate as Toukhatchevsky.

AN IDLE INTERLUDE IN GREECE



REFUGEE IN FRANCE
AT CÔTE D'ARGENT, AUGUST 1937

CHAPTER XXVII

"THEY HAVE BUILT THE SOCIALIST STATE FOR THEIR OWN ENDS . . ."

EACH day brought inexorably its budget of bad news. This was no liquidation of a plot however fantastic, no destruction of political parties, no repression of an opposition. It was the systematic extermination of all those who had served the Socialist régime to which I owed everything, to which I had wanted to consecrate my life. It became daily more impossible to have any doubts on the subject. What was happening was no less than a counter-revolution, but how could it thus have established itself in Russia without ever coming into the open and fighting? Historians will note, and will be able to explain, this extraordinary thing that has happened to us, this progressive modification of events by a bureaucracy working within a system more wholly totalitarian than any other—since it wields complete economic as well as political power—until the whole nature and object of the Soviet system is seen to have been radically altered.

I began to realise things clearly. It might be, quite possibly, that I should not myself be threatened, although I belonged to one of the generations which had been sacrificed, the generation of the Civil War, and had been the colleague of many of those who had suffered under the reaction, which meant that I was a witness who might one day speak, who might one day confront the guilty. . . . It could hardly be expected that I should have remained ignorant of the true inwardness of the spectacular trials and the hushed-up executions! . . . Still, I might be spared; but, even if I were, what work was there for me to do henceforth, what cause for me to serve?

I thought now that I could understand what lay behind Stalin's deep political game. The perfidy and cruelty of the ex-revolutionary had but become more strongly marked in acts of blood in proportion as the necessities of a changed political situation drove him on. To see what had happened one had only to consider the way the national revenue was distributed, taking salaries and prices as index points. I have already quoted the official figures of salaries obtaining in Moscow, according to a report drawn up by Khroustchev, secretary of the Committee of the Party's Moscow branch: 200 to 300 roubles a month for skilled, 100 for unskilled, workers—and those are among the highest paid in the country! The prices of foodstuffs and clothes are so high that the worker finds the greatest difficulty in supplying himself with food, clothes or lodging, except for a favoured few who, in the matter of the last-named item, are luckier than their fellows. In spite of the promises made by Molotov, the State is artificially maintaining the excessively high prices of the "free market", thanks to an arrangement by which the prices of all goods produced in factories and *sovkhoses* are arbitrarily settled. The State sells its products to the consumer at prices obtaining on the free—which means to say, the *country*—market. It is production, therefore, in terms of agriculture which really determines prices, further conditioned by the effects of inflation and by the needs of the country districts.

Let me try to make a comparison between the conditions of life as they apply to the town worker and the peasant. The first has nothing but his wage; the second, even when he is a member of a *kolkhoze*, has, and is free to do as he likes with, a vegetable garden, chickens, pigs, a number of smaller animals such as goats and sheep, as well as a cow, a calf and a horse. . . . . All this, for him, represents property. He has the right to sell, on his own account, the produce of his vegetable garden and of his animals, milk, eggs, green stuff. In addition to this, he receives from the "Collective", in proportion to the amount of work he gives, wheat, forage, other foodstuffs, and money. He is almost sure of being able to feed himself and dictate what prices the city worker shall pay for eggs, milk, and meat. . . . Of course these prices are to a certain extent affected by the products of industry, but, since such products come but rarely into the market, prices naturally tend to rise, and that spells disaster for the city dweller.

In many districts the peasants are still terribly poor, having been ruined by forced collectivisation. But their condition is improving: each season the earth bears, and there is always the market. The industrial worker, on the other hand, can, for the time being at least, expect no improvement. It must be remembered that Molotov, as president of the Council, declared three years ago that the reduction of prices planned for the next few years would amount to 40 or 50 per cent. I believed him, but his words remained mere words. A series of laborious tests carried out by Professor Prokopovitch of Prague on statistics officially supplied by the U.S.S.R., have led him to the conclusion that real wages among the workers of the U.S.S.R. are to-day 30 per cent lower than those in the same categories under the old régime. These figures are unfortunately correct. My own conclusions are almost identical. The return realised by the peasant from the cultivation of the soil has never fallen so low except in periods of famine, which are not infrequent, and the two most recent examples of which occurred in 1929 and 1935.

Under-nourishment is certainly one of the main causes of the difficulties experienced in obtaining satisfactory figures for factory output, though convenient scapegoats are singled out, called *saboteurs*, and shot. It is a fact that, though their mechanical equipment is among the most modern in existence, the mines of the Donetz Basin, for instance, have never yet—Stakhanovism and all—reached the output figure which might normally be expected of them. And why?—because the worker is badly fed, badly housed, worn-out with overwork, and weakened by continuous under-nourishment. The official reports on these subjects are heartrending and terrifying documents. The worker is doubly exploited: the State keeps back part—perhaps the greater part—of his just reward, for investment in still further production, for helping to pay the upkeep charges of a privileged class, for armaments; while most of what he does get goes, via the market, into the pocket of the peasant cultivator.

I should like to underline here the truth that a despotic and bureaucratic administration of Russia's economic life has laid a heavy burden on the country's back. The efforts made, under the ægis of the Plan, have led to fresh anarchy, wastage, breakdowns, and renewed experiments the cost of which must be reckoned in thousands of millions of roubles. Presumably this fact has weighed with the authorities. Why has there been no mention of a third Five Years' Plan? Because despotic control has destroyed all the advantages of a planned economy which needs for its design and execution knowledge, freedom from meddling, and competent directors who shall be responsible to the country at large. No absolute power, working through terror, irresponsible and incompetent by the very nature of its circumstances, and ill-informed, since it breeds automatically the habit of lying from top to bottom of the hierarchy upon which it depends for its intelligence, can administer an economic plan worthy of the name.

Stalin is probably convinced of the impossibility of realising the Socialist State for the creation of which I believe he worked sincerely for a long time. That his version of Socialism is not what most of us would call Socialism at all, matters little in this connexion. Stalin abandoned it from the moment that, faced with the double failure of his economic and of his political system, he deliberately discontinued his efforts to improve the lot of the working classes, that is to say to exploit them less. Since then he has changed direction and concentrated his efforts on organising a society based upon the deliberate exploitation of masses of men deprived of all civic rights, in the interest of a privileged minority which is to serve as the backbone of the régime. It is in the cities that this minority is centred. It consists of the High Functionaries of the Party, the Police, the Army, Industry, Education and Agriculture, and of a small number of highly specialised workmen, the "prize" Stakhanovists. But it needs a wider social backing. Where can it be found?

After having conquered the peasants in the struggle over collectivisation and inflicted upon them losses which could be reckoned in millions of lives, Stalin, faced with famine, had to find some way of winning them over to his side. The search for a solution of this particular problem started in 1931 and has been going on ever since. Concession after concession has been made to the farmers. Finally, in the course of the recent trials, excuses were found to shoot some of those responsible for collectivisation: Chéboldaév, for instance, who ruthlessly carried out Stalin's orders in the northern Caucasus where he superintended the deportation of thousands of Cossack peasants, and Charangovitch who played a similar part in White Russia. Enormous stretches of agricultural land, originally set aside for State farming, have been shared out among the *kolkhozes*—those "grain-producing factories" about the idyllic conditions of which so many glowing lies have been spread in foreign countries. The last straw has been the official blessing given to the slogan "Millionaire *Kolkhozes*", which is merely a modern variant of Bukharin's advice to the peasants at the time of the N.E.P. —"Get Rich!" At the present moment, therefore, there are poor *kolkhozes* and rich *kolkhozes*—some of them very rich, just in the same way as within a given *kolkhoze* there may be both poor and rich peasants. The members of a *kolkhoze* who have done well for themselves are destined to become champions of the régime. From them will be drawn the armed forces necessary to keep order in the industrial towns, and, in fact, with this end in view, Stalin has reconstituted the old Cossack military organisation which always, in the past, was known for its traditionalist and reactionary spirit.

From the ranks of the rich peasants, too, will come the technicians, the schoolmasters, the pseudo-intellectuals necessary for the running of the State; and it will be these same rich peasants who will benefit from the introduction of modern methods in agriculture and from high market prices. They will form the counterweight to the mass of the proletariat consisting of urban workers, small clerks, farm labourers and poor peasants, amounting in all to, say, forty or fifty millions. The Cossacks will shoot down working-class demonstrators just as they did in the days of the Tsar! Private property is not a necessary basis for the exploitation of man by man—Stalin has taught us that! Whether he can establish it permanently in his system without first destroying all those who, having lived by the light of the Socialist ideal, could hardly consent to such a *volte face*, remains to be seen. The probability is that he will have to find other men to carry out his orders, other men to run his Civil Service, men animated by a different spirit and working for different ends.

But that these ends have already, to a large extent, been realised, there is no denying. . . . Everything has had to take second place to them. A spirit of profound cynicism has taken possession of the country. Foreign visitors sometimes express surprise at the great strides made in Moscow in the matter of civic convenience. They know nothing about the historic monuments destroyed in the process, and it has never occurred to them to ask whether, from the point of view of progress, it wouldn't have been better to tear down the pestilential slums and replace them by workers' dwellings worthy of a civilised country. . . . But that is not the only point to be noticed. Whether the suppression of trams in certain streets and their supersession by motor-buses is really any very great improvement from the point of view of the city dweller who wants to get about, I am not at all sure. But there can be no doubt that it has resulted in opening up certain arteries for fast motor traffic, and making it easy for the police to keep a careful watch upon them. The avenues in question are those which lead from the centre of the city to the Mojaisk road, the Vosdvijenka, and the Arbat, those in short which Stalin's car takes when he goes to his Borovikhi house from the Kremlin. Twelve model motor roads radiate from Moscow to a distance of forty kilometres in twelve different directions—and they are the only really good roads in the whole of Russia! They serve those outlying suburbs in which the villas of the Government officials are situated: Mojaisk road, used frequently by Stalin, had no sooner been completed at enormous expense than it was further widened from its original 24 feet to 48. There was talk of paving these twelve roads with concrete and extending them to link up the capital with the towns in the vicinity, but nothing further has been done in the matter. The circle of villas once passed, one finds oneself again on the old Imperial highways which are not engineering feats of which to be particularly proud. . . .

By a decree of the Moscow Soviet a zone of wooded country and river works has been created at Borovikhi in which both building and bathing is strictly forbidden. (The object being that the waters that flow through Moscow should not be polluted!) Citizens are not even allowed to walk there. Why, I wondered, this wealth of precautions at Borovikhi particularly, while both above and below that point people are allowed to bathe and to sleep on the river bank? On inquiry, I learned that the whole district is reserved for villas of the officials of the O.G.P.U. which surround, at a respectful distance, the Dictator's home. I had occasion to visit a friend of mine in one of these villas. Our car entered an immense park-like estate, perfectly kept and still more perfectly watched. At every cross-roads militiamen in impeccable uniforms examined our passes. We were forbidden to enter the most private zone of all. The road was speckless—and quite empty; from time to time we passed a luxurious car. The landscape looked as though it had been carefully ventilated, swept, and trimmed to perfection. . . . My friend's villa would have stood comparison with any of the rich houses which are dotted about the neighbourhood of western capitals. It had been most carefully planned, and was equipped with terraces, verandas, tennis courts, lawns, and a private park. True, it did not belong to him, but was known as Villa No. X of the Central Executive Committee. The happy tenant, however, could enjoy it just as fully as though it had been his own for the rest of his natural life—or until he should fall into disgrace, an eventuality which would certainly hasten the former alternative! . . .

Let me pause a moment to consider how an influential personage in the present régime lives. In Moscow he is quartered in the Government building, where he has a flat of eight rooms, comfort, and two servants should he happen to be married and have a child. For holidays, he has a "Villa No. X of the Executive Committee", with two, three, or four servants, a private cinema if he so wishes, guest-rooms and equipment for all sorts of games —the whole paid for by the State. (In the Government building he pays a small rent.) One or two cars, with chauffeur, are at his disposition. If he wants anything, no matter how costly, he has only to use the telephone. His son is treated as though his father were a millionaire, with six servants at his beck and call, toys imported from abroad, and famous doctors to attend him when he is ill. He knows he has only to ask for what he wants and papa will put through a telephone call. . . . Should this high official of ours feel like taking a holiday for his health in the Caucasus or the Crimea, he will find everywhere the same comfort, will always travel with his family in sleepers, in special coaches, or even in special trains, at the public cost.

I made a short stay at the new Red Army rest-house built, under Voroshilov's supervision, at Sotchi. It is divided into wings the comfort of which, everywhere considerable, is graded according to the rank of those using them. The highest generals have a whole building set aside for them in a housing estate which is a model of technical ingenuity, designed to provide the best possible advantages of light, sun and air, with terraces which can be arranged to admit or keep out the sunlight by a system of movable glass partitions. . . . A funicular railway takes guests down to a private beach in such a way that they are spared all fatigue. This magnificent building was constructed at the cost of millions on a bare rock. I was rather embarrassed by an unexpected visit from Enver Bey, the Turkish military attaché at Moscow.

Voroshilov had given strict orders that no one was to be allowed to see the building before a certain date. It was impossible to refuse access to Enver Bey, but the director did not conceal from me the fact that he was very nervous about what might happen as a result of this act of disobedience.

I can't help wondering whether it is really worth while building such a perfect sanatorium for Red generals if they are only to be sent to death or prison when they leave it. But such lack of security is part and parcel of all tyrannies. I was told by the local big-wigs of special villas, in the same neighbourhood, reserved and specially built for Stalin, in the most outstanding beauty spots of Gagry, Sotchi, and Soukhoum. At Sotchi he has Villa No. 7 of the Central Executive Committee, which is built on the top of a wooded hill. A little lower down lived the governor of the district, the brothers Lakoba, and several other Government officials, including Ivanov, the People's Commissar for the Timber Industry, and Guikalo, a member of the Central Committee. All these men have since disappeared; the Lakobas—with the exception of the eldest who died before he could be arrested—and Ivanov have been shot.

Even the members of the Rothschild and Carnegie families would not be in a position to have all the scientific resources of a great country organised entirely in their private interests. I doubt even whether any constitutional monarch of Europe could isolate his private residence to the extent that Stalin has done at Borovikhi, or control the lay-out of his capital to fit in with the needs of his motoring fancies. . . . I don't know whether the idea really originated with Maxim Gorky, or whether Gorky was only the mouthpiece of Stalin, but certainly the official version is that it was Gorky who suggested the creation in Moscow of the Institute of Experimental

Medicine, a foundation unique in its kind, the principal object of which is to conduct research into the best means of easing and prolonging human life. Tens and hundreds of millions have been spent on it: the greatest specialists have been compelled to settle in Moscow in order to give their services to an enterprise which appeals more and more to the Dictator as he approaches his sixtieth birthday. . . . In the present age there are certain resources on which humanity can draw for the prolongation of life: these are good food, hygienic surroundings, and liberty (all that remains to be done for Stalin's *entourage*, obviously, is to suppress the death sentence and the inquisition of the Law Courts). But the hospitals and maternity homes of the U.S.S.R. are still short of drugs, antiseptics, medicated gauze, and the most elementary necessities for the dressing of wounds. Whole regions devastated by malaria are unprovided with quinine. No one bothers about such things. The State, set now to serve the interests of those—and of him in particular—whose careers are identified with it, is concerned to prolong the lives only of a precious few—precious at least to themselves. What I have quoted is a symbol of what is happening generally, and the action of the privileged few in the U.S.S.R. shows only too clearly the truth of a cruel remark which I heard in Moscow: "They have already built the Socialist State for their own ends. . . ."

My generation has known revolutionary leaders who sought nothing for themselves, who had nothing of their own, who, as Government officials, army officers, and members of the Party Committees, lived the life of their fellows, and thought only of how best they might serve the common weal. These men are no more. The régime which they worked to establish exists now only in name. They fought to prevent the exploitation of man by man, and to build a freer and more just society which should assure to all its members the maximum of well-being. Stalin has had them shot. He reigns alone, with his panic fear of Socialism, in that lonely Kremlin of the spirit which he has built for himself and his spies out of the corpses of his brethren.

THE END

PARIS, *January-June 1938*

INDEX

INDEX

Abyssinian War 318
Afanassiev 165
Agabekov 262
Agnelli, Senator 252
Alksnis, Vice-Commissar for Defence 6; Commander of the Flying Services 4, 109, 301, 305; Downfall 306
Amanullah, King of Afghanistan. His visit to Russia 221–222
Antonov, leads peasant rising in 1921 143
Antonov-Ovséenko 333
Aprélev 124
Apsé 306
Arifov 138, 139
Arkus 201, 250
Arossev viii
Asmus ix, 257, 275; arrest 31
Asséev 146, 148
Athens 1–31 *passim*. In 1924 203–204; in 1936 310–314 *passim*

Baltrouchaitis, Lithuanian Minister in Moscow 308
Bariatinsky, Prince 180
Barmine, Alexandre. Parentage 39; life with his grandparents 40–44; with his mother 44–49; with his father 45; early reading 44; school 47–49; refugee with his mother at Gomel 50; becomes a tutor at 14 51; holiday in Finland 53–55; journey to Kiev 57; tutorship in the Ukraine 63; arrested by the Germans and escapes 65; at Vissky with his uncle Peter 66; return to Kiev 67; joins the Red Army as a volunteer vii, 70; admitted to the Communist Party 72; baptism of fire 73; political Commissar of a battalion vii, 75; attends course for Red officers at Minsk vii, 79 ff; in action against General Haller 87; member of the Gomel Soviet 89; serves with the XVIth Army 93 ff; takes part in the advance on Warsaw 100–103; at the War College for senior officers vii, 104–117; studies oriental languages 114; takes his mother to live with him 120; has an unhappy love affair 121; goes to Bokhara 123 ff; marries Olga Fédorovna 133; consul at Karchi 135–139; returns to Moscow 140; reconciliation with Olga Fédorovna 149; joins Chicherin's staff 151; Second Secretary of Legation at Riga 157 ff; excluded from the War College 167; reinstated 167; attends the Moscow disarmament conference of 1922 169–171; becomes the father of twins and loses his wife 175; at the Marino Rest House 180–181; appointed Consul-General in Ghilan 186; journey to Europe in 1924 200–211; supports the Central Committee at the XIVth Party Conference 214; Director of the "International Book Company" 219–220; with Commercial Delegation in Paris 231–244; returns to Moscow and attends XVIth Party Conference in 1930 245; Director General of

Barmine, Alexandre (*cont.*)
  Imports in Paris vii, 249; seconded for service in Italy 1931 251–254; Commercial Agent in Brussels vii, 254–262; victim of Belgian police action 259–261; returns to Moscow 262; Vice-President of "Stanko-import" 264; member of Commercial Delegation to Poland vii, 272–274; his changing attitude to Stalin 277–284; resigns from "Stankoimport" and becomes President of "Auto-Moto-Export" viii, 284; reprimanded 297; his relations with Toukatchevsky 302–305; resigns from "Auto-Moto-Export" 309; First Secretary of Embassy at Athens vii, 309; appointed Consul-General at Alicante 318; his motor tour through Eastern Europe to Moscow in 1936 320–328; realizes the nature of Stalin's dictatorship 337–348; Chargé d'Affaires at Athens 4 ff; comes under suspicion 19 ff; escapes from a trap 21 ff; flees to France 29; shadowed by secret police in Paris ix, 30
Barmine, Alexandre, Jnr. Birth 175; joins his father in Belgium 254
Barmine, Gregory 50
Barmine, Boris. Birth 175; joins his father in Belgium 254
Barmine, Nicolas 50; death 55
Beck, Colonel 272–273
Beksadian 156, 334; arrest 31
Bela-Kun 112
Belgium in 1931 254–262
Benni, Signor 252
Béssédovsky. Refuses to return to Russia 242
Bessonov 16
Biedny, Demian 65
Biélenkii. Conducts the "purge" of the Commercial Delegation in Paris 244
Biélotsky 168
Bigomolov. Arrest 31
Bloukhov, Michael Ivanovitch 84, 90, 98, 99, 114
Blücher, Marshal 11, 12, 14
Blumkin, Jacques 142, 187
Bobristchev 200
Bodrov, André 123, 282–283
Boév 272, 274
Bogouslavsky 335
Bokhara, Political conditions in 1921 122, 126, 127, 130, 131, 132; Description of 129, 133; English activities in 136
Bokis 306
"Book purge" of 1936 317–318
Borchtchevsky 119, 120
Born, Georg (see Stern)
Boubenetz 108
Boubnov 76, 116, 165–166
Boudienny, Marshal 14; in command of the cavalry during the advance on Warsaw 101, 108, 124, 239, 274, 282
Brannitzkaya, Countess 39, 66
Breslav 251
Brioussov, Valère 147
Briquet, excluded from the Party 143, 144, 230
Brockdorff-Rantzau, Count 152
Brodovsky ix
Broglie, Duc de 27
Brown, Mr. 282–283
Brussilov 164
Bukharin 16, 113; attitude in the Trades Unions dispute 116, 145, 147, and the NEP 161–163, 165, 195, 201, 223; supports Stalin against Trotsky in 1927 226, 227, 228; in opposition 233; trial 233 note; recantation 247, 292, 330

Bullitt, American Ambassador in Moscow 307
Bureaucracy under Stalin 285–293; its power over the army 303; how the bureaucrats live 345

"Café de Pégase" 148–150
Chadenko 108
Chakh-Mouradov 234–236
Chamyl, the Imam 180
Charangovitch 341
Charikopodchipnik Ball-Bearing Factory 282–283
Chéboldaév 341
Chen-tzu-Min 212
Chiang-Kai-Shek 76, 224
Chicherin, Georges Vassiliévitch. Commissar for Foreign Affairs 151 ff; his scheme for a League of Peoples 153, 169; elected to the Central Committee 217; at odds with Litvinov 217; retirement and death 218, 307
Chkiriatov 296–297
Choumiatsky, Ambassador to Persia 186 ff, 200, 201; Director of Cinematographic Production 280–281
Ciano, Admiral 252
Cinema in Russia 280–281
Citroën, M. 293
Communists and the Popular Front in Greece—and elsewhere 312
Cossack military organization reconstituted 342
Cost of Living in Russia in 1934 276; in 1936 338–340

Dan, Fédor 32
Davtian, Russian Minister in Warsaw 324; arrested 31; accused 317
Demerdzis, Professor 311
Denikin, General 9, 71, 76; advances on Toula 84, 106
Diakanov 291–292
Divilkovsky 243
Djemal Pasha 152
Dmitrievsky 203
Doletsky 331
Doumer, President, assassinated 258
Dovgalevsky 19; Ambassador in Paris 232ff, 242ff, 249
Dovjenko 280
Drobnis 335
Duhamel, Georges 204
Duncan, Isadora 187
Dybenko 108, 117; at Kronstadt in 1921 119, 120, 160, 165
Dybetz 201, 292
Dzerjinsky 195

Edward VIII of England 319
Egorov, Marshal 9, 11, 14, 274
Eisenstein 280
Ejov 8, 17; responsible for the murder of Ignace Reiss 30, 210, 228, 237, 257, 297; replaces Yagoda 331 (and references *passim*)
Eliava ix, 274, 294, 297
Emir of Bokhara 126
Engineers' Trial 282, 315
Enoukidzé 114, 297
Enver-Bey 345–346
Enzeli (Pahlavi), Port of 99, 186
Éon, Chevalier d' 27, 28
Espionage fever of 1936 333–334
Essenin 148; marries Isadora Duncan 187
Exploitation of the workers in contemporary Russia 339–340
Export policy of U.S.S.R. in 1929 239
Eydeman 306; death 10

Fechner ix, 154
Fedko 109; at Kronstadt in 1921 119, 120, 165

Five Years' Plan 233–237; and Italy 252; foreign reactions to 255; effects in Russia 276–277; summed up 341
Food Crisis of 1921 118
Franco, at funeral of George V of England 319
Friedland 128
Froumkina, Esther 89

Gaevsky 166
Gamarnik 302, 303; career 8; suicide 6, 7
Ganetsky 155
Gatovsky 107
Gay 108
Gayster 83
Gdynia (Polish port of) 273
General Staff, wrecked by Stalin 305
Genoa Conference 156–157
George II of Greece 5; recalled from exile 311; his efficient restoration of the Monarchy 312
George III of England 28
George V of England, death 318; funeral 319
Georgian insurrection of 1924 202
Glebov-Alivov 333
Goldberg 128
Gorgoulov, Doumer's assassin 258
Gorky, Maxim 233 note; 274, 346
Gorky Motor Works 291, 293
Gourévitch 233, 239
Graziani 31
Greece in 1936 3–35, 310–314
Grigoriev 71
Guerchy 28

Haller, General 84, 86, 89
Hammer, Mr., runs an American Company in Moscow for the manufacture of office accessories 219
Hekker ix; head of the War College 143; his career 144, 305; Voroshilov's "Chef de Protocole" 306–307; Corps Commander 307; arrest 307
Hitler, Adolf 208–209, 272
Hymans, Paul, Belgian Foreign Minister 255

Iakir 15, 87; career and death 10
Iakoubovitch 31
Iakovlev 248
Illiouchenko 93
Industry in the U.S.S.R. in 1925 218–221; during first Five Years' Plan 233–237; in 1932 264–271; at end of the first Five Years' Plan 282–293
Institute of Experimental Medicine 346–347
Ioudénitch, marches on Petrograd 84
Iouréniev ix, 17, 115; Ambassador to Bokhara 122; his career 122, 125, 151; takes the author to Riga 157; Ambassador in Rome 206–207; disgrace 207–208; arrest 31
Ioussim 283
Ipatiev 219
Italian Air Manœuvres of 1931 253
Ivanov 346

Joffe 122
Joukovsky 294–295, 296

Kachirin 14
Kafandaris 313
Kaganovitch, Lazar 231, 248, 257, 300
Kaganovitch, Michael 300
Kalinin 118, 228
Kaménev 164, 195; in opposition to Trotsky 214; in minority at the XIVth Party Conference

Kaménev (*cont.*)
  215; feeling against in the Party 217; joins Trotsky 223; excluded from the Party 226; recantation 227; trial 314 ff, 328–331
Kaminsky, Dr 233 and note
Kanghilari 151
Kantorovitch 155
Karakhan, Léon Mikhailovitch ix, 114, 123; career, description and fate 155–156, 179
Kerensky 54, 58
Khadidzé 121
Khakkimov, Karim 201
Kharin 244
Khassis 115, 137
Khibinogorsk 273
Khodjaev, Fayçoulla 122, 131, 132, 159
Kholmogorov, Professor 173
Kirov 246, 314, 315
Kissis 248
Kobetsky 311, 313, 314, 315, 316; accused 317, 320; death 5, 18
Kolkhozes, conditions in 327, 338, 342
Kollontay, Alexandra 108; mouthpiece of opposition during the Trades Unions dispute 116, 117
Koltchak, Admiral 9, 84
"Komintern" 185, 260, 263
Kondylis, General, Dictator of Greece 311; death 311
Kopp, Victor 170
Korjenko 17
Kork, in command of the XVIth Army 92, 100, 301; death 10, 306
Kostrov 228
Koubychev 233 note
Kousskov 48, 51
Koutchouk-Khan 143, 197
Koutépov, General, kidnapped in Paris 242
Kouzmin, Nicholas 250–251
Koutznetsk, 235, 240, 241
Kovtioukh 109
Krassin, Commissar for External Commerce 220
Krestinsky viii, 5, 154, 206, 209, 210, 274, 318, 331, 332; arrest and disappearance 16, 333
Kronstadt insurrection 119, 120, 250
Kroustchev 276, 338
Kroutchinsky 165
Krylenko 96, 97
Kuomintang 224, 226
Kuropatkin 107

Lakoba, brothers 346
Lansbury George, 246
Lapiro, Professor 220
Latsis 306
Lebediev 164, 165
Lenin, Vladimir Illitch xi, 32, 52, 83; decides on the Polish campaign 94, 106, 112; attitude to the Trades Unions 116, 126, 147; inaugurates N.E.P. 161–163, 165; death 193 (and references *passim*)
Levin, Dr. 274
Levine 58, 59, 60, 65, 69, 71
Levinson 251
Levsky 297
Likhachev 291, 292, 299, 300
Lioubimov 238
Litvinov 16, 17, 20, 26, 159, 170, 208; works against Chicherin 217, 317, 322 (and references *passim*)
Loganovsky 102, 252, 274, 296, 297
Loraine, Sir Percy 196
Lorenz, Russian Minister in Vienna 323
Louis XV 28
Loukianov 18, 20, 25, 26
Lukasiewicz, Polish delegate to the disarmament conference of 1922 170, 273–274, 307

Lumière, Louis 241
Lunatcharsky 122, 147

Machand, René 153
Magnitogorsk 235, 273
Maksakova 324
"Manifesto of the Ten" 116
Manouilsky 122
Marino Rest House 180–181, 246
Marteaux, Dr., Belgian Socialist 255
Martynov 107, 110, 111, 149
Mateotti 206
Matousenko 108
Mayakowsky 145, 146, 148
Mazourenko 71
Mdivani, Boudou 233
Mechlis 290
Mejlaouk 122
Mélamed 283–284
Mesis 306
Metaxas, General, Dictator of Greece 5 ff, 311, 312, 313
Meyer 200, 292
Meyerhold 146
Mguéladzé (Ilya Vardine) 275
Mikoyan 280
Miller, General, at Archangel 84, 250
Mirbach, Count 142
Mirza Djahar Khan 174
Model 52, 70
Mohilev 92, 96
Molotov 167, 285, 338, 339
Mordkin 146
Moroz 225
Moscow in 1917 54; in the autumn of 1920 104–107; in 1921 140–150; in 1923 174; in 1930 245–246; in 1932 264–266; in 1936 333–334; replanning of 343–344
Moscow, Disarmament Conference of 1922 169–171
Motor Industry, under the Five Years' Plan 285, 298, 300
Motoring in Russia, in 1932 267–271; in 1936 327–328
Moukhedinov 127, 132–133, 138
Mouklévitch, Admiral 11, 160
Mouralov 335
Mouraviev, operations against Kiev 61; killed in revolt against Stalin 62
Mourodian 250
Mussolini, Benito 207–208
Mustapha Kemal 188

N—— (the architect). His attitude to Stalin typical of that of the intelligentsia in 1934 278–279
Nejdanova 146
N.E.P., effect on living conditions in Moscow 161–163
Newbold (English Member of Parliament) 168
Neznamow 107
Nikolaev (Kirov's assassin) 315
Nivernais, Duc de 27
Novitsky, brothers 107
Novitsky, General 164, 170–171

Obolensky-Ossinsky 293
Olga Fédorovna 124, 125; marriage to the author 133; falls sick of fever 134; leaves Bokhara 135; reconciled to the author, and settles down with him in Moscow 149, 171–173; death 175
Ordjonikidzé 233 note, 283, 290, 297, 299, 300, 335
Orlov, Vice-Commissar for Defence 6; Admiral 11; U.S.S.R. representative at the Coronation of George VI of England 13, 336; fate 336
Orlova 281
Osolin 306
Ostrovsky ix, 168, 239, 250, 257

Ouborévitch 9
Ouglanov 227; recants 228
Ouritsky 109; at Kronstadt in 1921 119, 165
Oustinov, Minister at Athens 203; death 31

Pan-Hindu Committee in Bokhara 127, 128
Pascal, Pierre 153
Pastoukhov 114, 155, 164
Pauker 301
Pavlenko 334
Pavlov 76
Pavlovitch-Weltman 128
Peasants: measures against in 1928 227, 229; their life as opposed to the townsman's in contemporary Russia, and their place in the Stalin régime 338–343
"Permanent Revolution," the theory of 214
Persia, political and social conditions in 1923 188 ff, 197–199
Peters 306
Petlura, Simeon, President of the Ukraine 58, 61, 76
Petrichenko 63
Petrov 146
Piatakov 6, 69, 165, 195, 233, 290; trial 328, 331
Piérard, Belgian Socialist 255
Pivert, Marceau 31
Plethiev, Professor 233 note
Podolsky, Boris ix, 334; arrested 31
Poland in 1932 272–274
Polichtchouk 289–290
Polish Campaign, the 100–103
Pomérantsev 116
Popular Front 312
Potemkin 18, 26
Potiemkin, Vladimir 203
Pouchin 253
Poudovkin 280
Poutna, member of the opposition 11; military attaché in London and arrest 336; death 11
Praslin, Duc de 28
Preobrajensky 113, 147; and the N.E.P. 162
Prigojin 246
Primakov 10, 11
Privilege in contemporary Russia 344–347
Prokopovitch, Professor 339
Prosorovsky 99–100

Radek, Karl 109, 113; during the food crisis of 1921 118, 119, 128, 147, 185, 195; protests against Stalin's Chinese policy 224, 214, 335 (and references *passim*)
Radin 103
Radus-Sincovitchus, General 170
Radziwill, Prince 170
Rakovsky 76, 101, 156, 232
Ramazovov Company, the 295, 296
Ramsin affair, the 316
Raskolnikov 99; Ambassador to Afghanistan 123; honoured by Amanullah 221; Minister in Bulgaria 310; refuses to return to Russia 310; accused 317
Red Army, training of officers 83
Reisner, Igor 247
Reisner, Larissa 123, 185–186
Reiss, Ignace, denounces Stalin 29; murdered by O.G.P.U. agents 30
Revolution, outbreak of the 51
Reza-Khan 188, 190, 191, 197
Riazanov 147, 318
Richevitch, Choura 105
Riga in 1921 157–159
Rioutine 225; attempts to impeach Stalin 228; condemned to death 229
Rochal 76

"Trotskyism" (*cont.*)
  of Trotskyists at the November celebrations of 1927 225–226
Trott, Mr., British Consul at Recht 188, 189, 195–196
Tsaldaris, Greek monarchist leader 311; death 311

Ukraine, first Bolshevik rising 59 ff; Red armies arrive in Kiev 61, 62; Kiev occupied by the Germans 63; end of Ukrainian independence 68–69; civil war 71 ff
Unschlicht 101, 109

Valetsky 159–160
Van der Ginst, Belgian Socialist 204, 255
Vandervelde, Émile 204, 260
Van Zeeland 261
"Vardine, Ilya" (see Mguéladze)
Varga, Professor 159–160
Vassyf-Bey 287, 307
Vatsetis 164
Velitchko 107
Venizelos in 1936 311
Ventzov 109
Verbitskaya 107
Verhovsky 107
Vichinsky 34, 330
Vinnitchenko, President of the Ukraine 58
Vlassov 309
Volovitch 301
Voroshilov, Klementii Efrémovitch ix, 6, 10, 12; and the trial of the Generals 15, 101, 108; sides with Stalin against Trotsky 164, 228, 250, 257, 300, 302, 303, 304, 305, 345, 346 (and references *passim*)
Vorovsky 243

War, the Great 48 ff
War College for Senior Officers in Moscow 104 ff; "purged" in 1921 141; attitude during the Stalin-Trotsky controversy 164–165; second purge 165–167
Waterlow, Sir Sydney 319
Wauters, Arthur, Belgian Socialist 255
Weitzer 238
White Sea–Baltic Canal 273
Wrangel, Baron 169
Wullens, Maurice 32

Yagoda 228; trial 233 note, 241 274; and Zinoviev trial 330; fal 331; shot 333

Zaslavsky 16
Zelenyi 71, 73, 74
Zetkin, Clara 159
Zikhon 256
Zinoviev 103; attitude towards th Trades Unions 116, 128; and th N.E.P. 163, 185, 186, 195; i opposition to Trotsky 214; in minority at the XIVth Par Conference 215; feeling again him in the Party 217; joi Trotsky in opposition 223; e cluded from the Party 226; r cantation 227, 247, 275; tr 314 ff, 328–331 (and referenc *passim*)
Zotov 108
Zuckerman ix, 114, 154